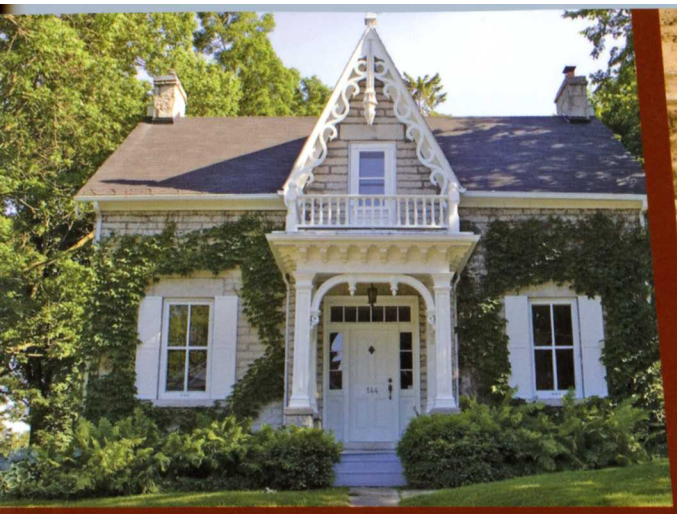
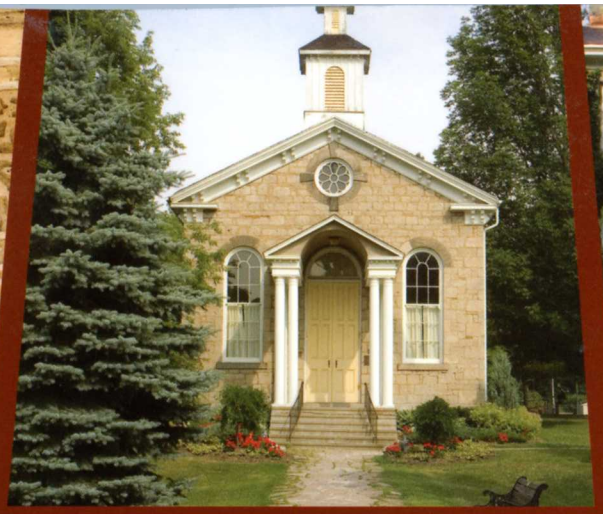
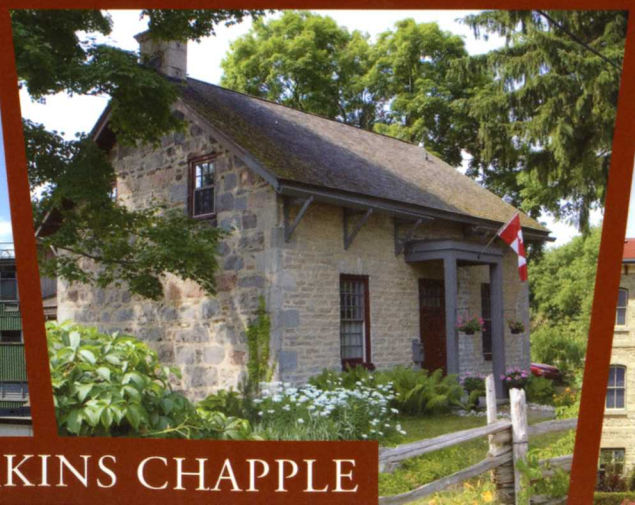
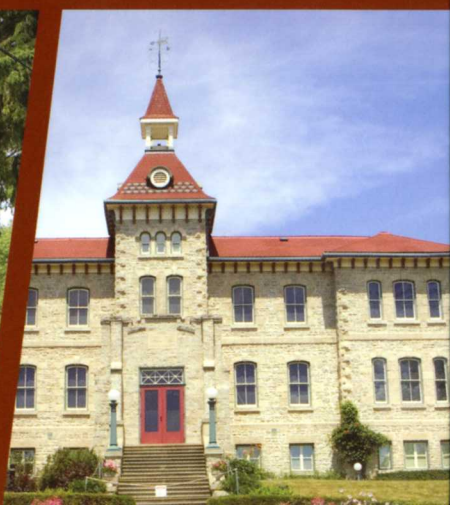





A HERITAGE OF STONE

BUILDINGS OF THE NIAGARA PENINSULA, FERGUS AND ELORA, GUELPH, REGION OF WATERLOO, CAMBRIDGE, PARIS, ANCASTER-DUNDAS-FLAMBOROUGH, HAMILTON AND ST. MARYS



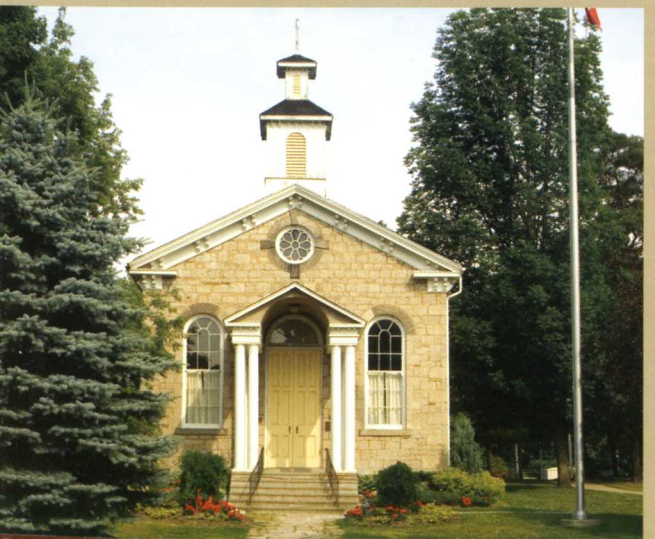




NINA PERKINS CHAPPLE









Introduction

Stone has always been considered the most prestigious building material. The pyramids and temples of antiquity and the great cathedrals and palaces of medieval Europe have firmly established the tradition that stone was the prime choice for building great monuments. Compared to brick and wood, stone is by far the oldest building material. The sedimentary (layered) stone of southwestern Ontario—limestone and sandstone—was formed as long ago as 385 million years, while the igneous (once molten) granite fieldstone is millions of years older. We live, work, and worship inside these buildings of stone with hardly a thought given to their primordial origins. Stone buildings hold a special attraction, a fascination with their ageless quality, strength, and endurance, and with the natural beauty of the stone itself.

As the strongest and most permanent building material, stone was traditionally used for important, large-scale engineering projects. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when British North America was just opening up for settlement, stone was frequently chosen for building new transportation and defense systems. Britain sent numbers of skilled stonemasons to the colony to work on such substantial masonry projects as the British Naval Yards in Kingston (1820), the Rideau Canal (1832), and Kingston's Fort Henry (1833). Stonemasons were also in demand for building the Erie Canal (1825) and the second Welland Canal (1845). The next demand came during the building of the railroads in the early 1850s as stonemasons were

Fieldstone was the masonry preferred by the Mennonite settlers of Waterloo, as illustrated in this side view of the Swope House in West Montrose.

sent out across the province to erect massive masonry viaducts and retaining walls. It was then that these stonemasons learned about communities that promised future work.

The timing was ideal for a sudden boom in stone buildings. Railways brought the promise of future growth, and the citizens of flourishing young communities were poised to transform their villages of pioneer wooden buildings into solid, ageless, stone streetscapes reminiscent of their homelands. Original settlers had acquired sufficient wealth; local governments were firmly established; and prosperity attracted more immigrants, including well-trained stonemasons primarily from the British Isles and Ireland. (By comparison, few masons came from America because building in stone was relatively rare during this era, being limited primarily to upper New York state and Pennsylvania.) In Ontario, the stone buildings erected during this transformative period of the 1850s to the 1870s include some of the most notable structures ever built in the province.

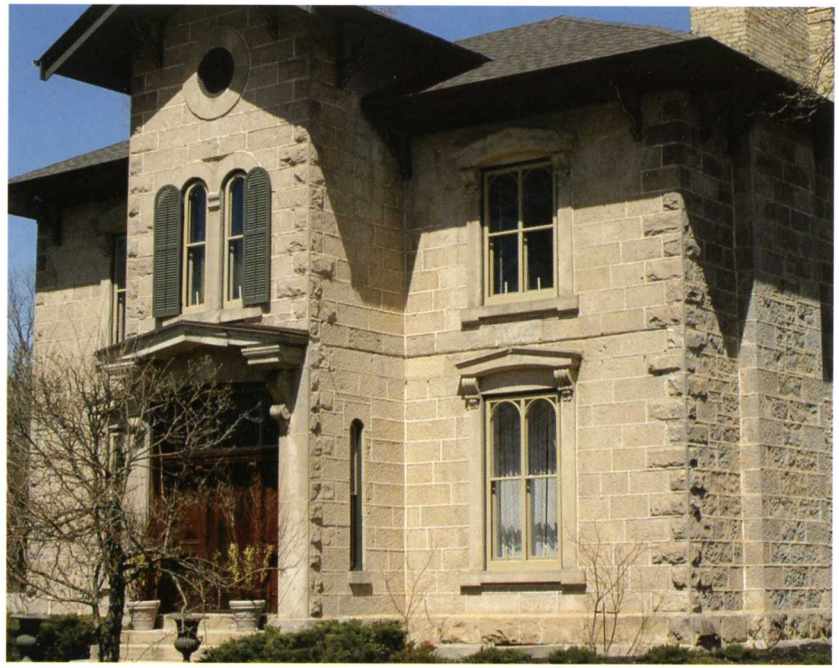
When I set out on my quest for stone buildings in southwestern Ontario, I discovered it was the landscape itself (the geography and the geology) that determined where building in stone became prolific. Although the region sits on bedrock, stone for quarrying generally became accessible by the action of watercourses over the millennia as they cut their way down through the rock, or by the gradual upheaval of the Earth's crust as in the formation of the Niagara Escarpment. Quarried stone consisted of various forms of sandstone and limestone (the latter is the term used generally in architecture; geologists break it down more specifically to limestone, dolomitic limestone, and dolomite). In southwestern Ontario, stone quarries appeared along the Grand, Speed, and Thames Rivers and along the Niagara Escarpment, starting where it rises out of the Niagara River at Queenston, and concentrating around the head of Lake Ontario. Because stone was not easily transported, stone towns developed where the stone was quarried.

Fieldstone, including granite from the Canadian Shield, was left scattered across the landscape by glaciers as they retreated 10,000 years ago. Because of its widespread occurrence in the countryside, fieldstone

became a favourite building material for rural farmhouses and, occasionally, for entire barn buildings, not just the foundations. Supply as well as the ethnic background of the settlers largely determined where fieldstone buildings appeared. The stone, identified for each building in the text, refers to the walls of the principal façades. Rubblestone was commonly used in back and side walls.

The subject—stone buildings of southwestern Ontario—casts a wide net and catches an amazingly rich resource—literally thousands of stone buildings of all types. The 114 examples chosen for this book represent only a small fraction of stone architecture found in the area. While masonry structures are often well-known and even revered in their own hometowns, knowledge of their counterparts in other southwestern Ontario localities is limited. The book breaks new ground by introducing the reader to a broad overview of communities that were building in stone, all around the same time. As a result, the material for each area must be limited to a brief sample. This general approach, on the other hand, allows us to include all building types—whether houses, town halls, churches, commercial blocks, or industrial buildings—located in all types of settlements, from the small village to the large urban area. The purpose is to entice the reader to explore further, to discover the timeless beauty and skilled craftsmanship of these works in stone.

Choosing 114 representative buildings from the thousands of candidates meant narrowing the focus to a few prime elements. First, the buildings had to be built in local—not imported—stone because this embodies quite literally the natural, indigenous character of the site. Second, buildings in concentrated numbers (i.e., settlements) were preferred because, collectively, they could build a picture of a place, its character, and identity. (This decision unfortunately ruled out most of the historic fieldstone farmhouses and small hamlets that beautify the Ontario countryside.) Lastly, communities of different ethnic backgrounds—Scottish, English, and German—were chosen because masonry techniques show an amazing variety from place to place, according to the cultural heritage of the settlers. For each criterion,



Squared limestone masonry is used in Inglebrook.

Both the Ohio sandstone, used on the Hamilton Custom House (left) and the local limestone used on the Guelph City Hall (right) can be more easily carved than most limestones.

though, there are exceptions; for example, the Mennonite farmhouses of Waterloo are obviously not in an urban area, but, more importantly, they articulate clearly their Pennsylvania-German heritage.

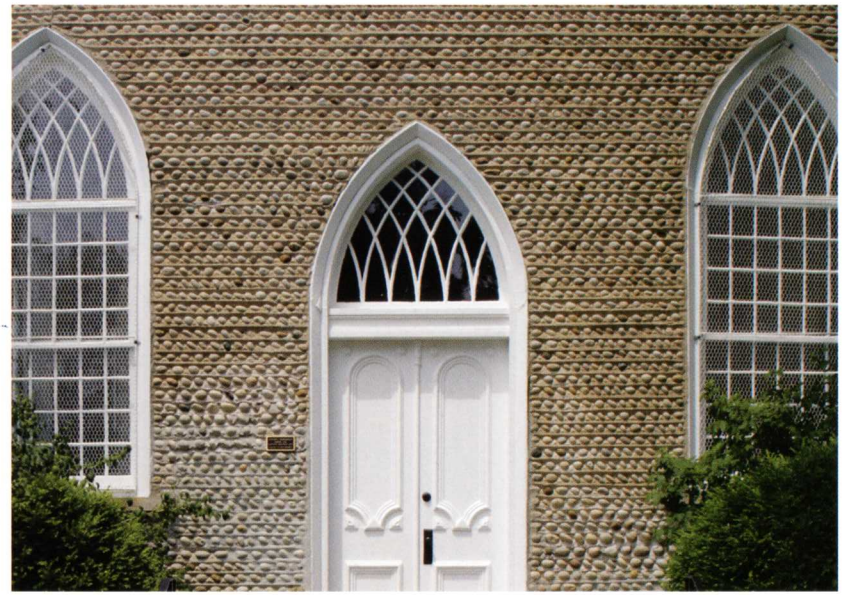
Perhaps the strongest message that comes out of this broad approach is the surprising degree of regional variation in stone architecture, even between nearby towns. These variations grew in part out of the difference of the local stone itself and how it was used. Stone buildings disclose all sorts of information about their makers: give clues to their origins: the Mennonites of Waterloo preferred unshaped natural fieldstone collected off their land and laid randomly in a wall, using an ample supply of mortar for support. Settlers in the Scottish settlements of Fergus and Galt built structures of squared stone, fitted tightly together in rows with relatively little mortar, often hammer-dressed (not smooth), and usually with little or no added decoration. On the other hand, Guelph's amber-grey limestone could be tooled or carved into an elaborate array of pedimental or segmental lintels and beautiful console brackets, similar to the ornamental work in Hamilton,

which was sculpted in sandstone from the escarpment. Each community, too, had its own sense of identity, that would be expressed in its architecture.

In every community, certain personalities became prominent because of their impact on their towns: the Elora Mill would not have existed without the indefatigable Scot, J. M. Fraser; St. Marys might have been slower to develop without the civilizing efforts of the Hutton family; Paris might never have acquired its legacy of cobblestone buildings if the American Levi Boughton had not come to town; and Guelph would have looked different without the remarkable talents of the English stonecarver Matthew Bell.

The stonemasons, carvers, and quarrymen are the real heroes of this story, but, unfortunately, information about their lives and work is sparse. These masons would also have had strong views on the appropriate mortar and pointing techniques to use. Because historic stone buildings have been repointed numerous times over the years, identifying the generations of stonemasons have added their own style of pointing over the years to a building, investigation into original mortar warrants an in-depth study of its own. (Owners of stone buildings should be warned against repointing in hard Portland cement—it can cause deterioration of the stone due to the freeze-thaw cycle.)

To put it in a larger context, the stone architecture of Quebec that had begun centuries earlier and culminated in such beautiful places as Montreal and Quebec City is deservedly well known, as are the stone buildings of eastern Ontario, found in Kingston, Ottawa, and Perth among other places. The stone legacy of southwestern Ontario, however, is still to be fully discovered. Collectively, this splendid heritage is an important dimension of the province's architectural resources. Perhaps our present-day eyes do not always see the subtle varieties in the masonry, or the art in the stone carvings, or the beauty in the proportions that our forebearers did. Every stone building is different; clues to its time, place, and builder are embedded in its fabric. It is well worth the time to take a second look. These buildings have their own stories to tell, if we listen.



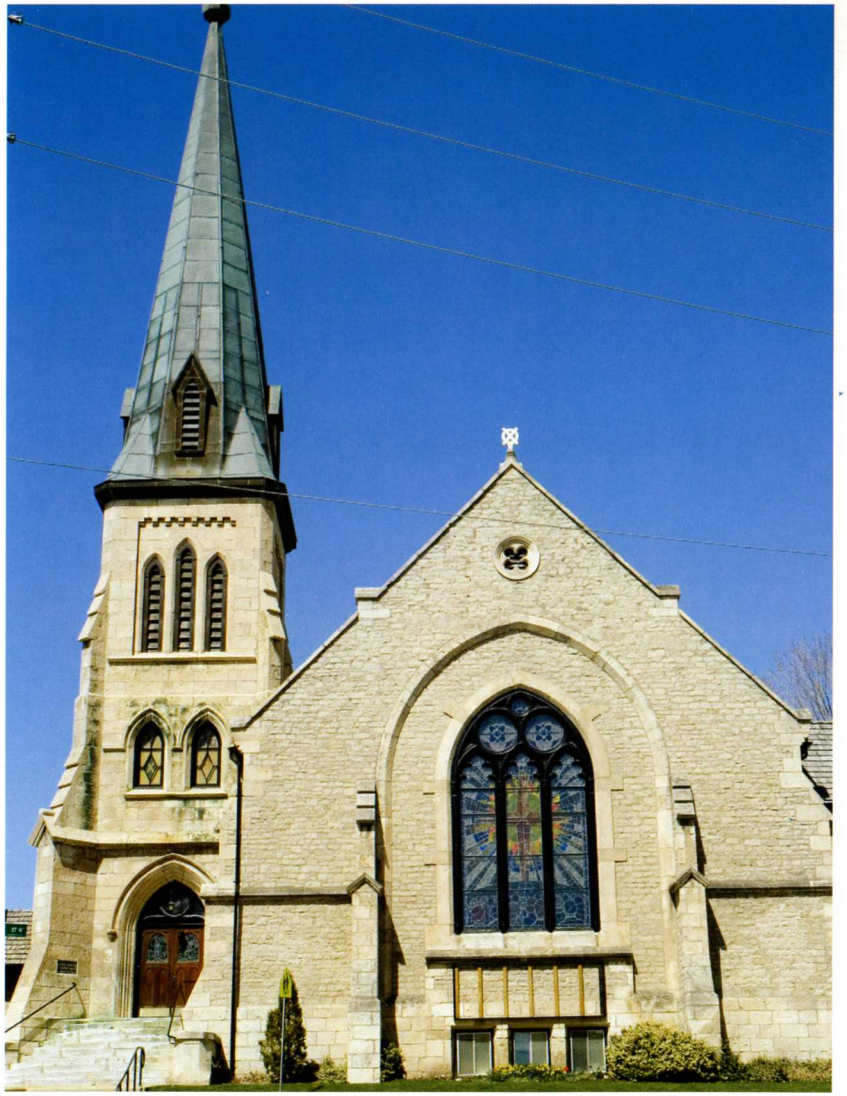
Cobblestone was a specialized form of masonry used in Paris before Confederation.

Fergus and Elora

Situated on the upper Grand River just four kilometres apart, Fergus and Elora have shared a common background, but have been traditionally arch-rivals. Now they are amalgamated into a new political entity, Centre Wellington. Both were founded in the 1830s by adventurous Scottish entrepreneurs. Their grand schemes included purchasing vast areas of unbroken forest in Upper Canada and establishing new communities at the best water-power sites available, a movement modelled after the eighteenth-century Scottish "new towns." Adam Fergusson and James Webster, both gentleman farmers, founded a village site at "Little Falls" called Fergus in 1833. It was intended to be an exemplary Scottish-Canadian settlement for their 7,300-acre portion of Nichol Township. Captain William Gilkison, also a Scot, founded Elora in 1832 as part of his 14,000-acre purchase in the same township. Both settlements developed where the Grand River cascaded down through narrow gorges, providing excellent water power for industries and a beautiful setting for establishing a new life in the wilderness. Both communities made use of limestone near the surface and developed stone quarries along the riverbanks that yielded a supply of building stone and mortar.

On one hand, the founders of Fergus invested personally in the settlement; Fergusson actively sought out "carefully selected Scottish immigrants who possessed money and education." On the other hand, the premature death of Captain William Gilkison one year after founding Elora left the new settlement bereft of a driving force and his

Left: Rosemount Cottage, built in the early 1870s in the Italianate Revival style, rivals any of its Elora contemporaries with its beautifully carved sculptures that crown the front entrance and window heads. Rosemount Cottage previously served as a private school and is again a private home.



The 1862 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, designed by architect David Murray of Guelph, has a high nave and buttressed corner tower. The masonry combines the small, rough-faced Fergus stone with the lighter, smooth Guelph stone.

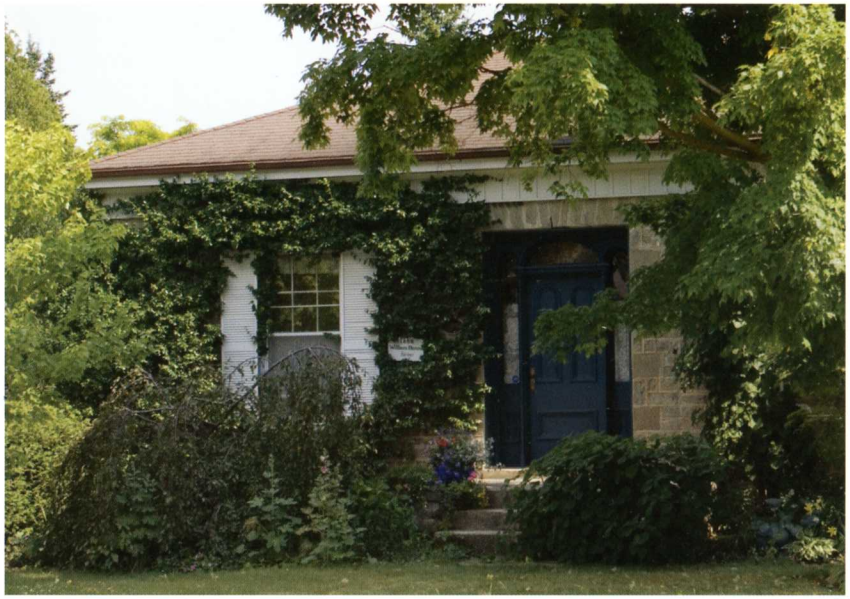
generous private support. By the 1850s, both villages had begun to grow, just when local limestone had become readily available and skilled stonemasons had arrived searching for work. It was during the following decades that Fergus gradually came of age as a "stone town": stores; churches; industries; stables; liveries; dwellings large and small—buildings of all types—were constructed in stone. Fergus still is remarkable for its wealth of stone architecture, attributable in part to its citizens' common Scottish heritage and in part to the abundant supply of local stone and the presence of skilled masons. Fergus today is said to have a resource of two hundred stone buildings.

By 1858, with a population of about 1,000, Fergus had grown large enough to be incorporated as a village and prosperous enough to begin the transformation from a pioneer outpost to a substantial downtown. While industries served as the economic catalyst for several decades following the mid-century mark, the long-term sustainability of this market town has depended on its business district. In the second half of the nineteenth century, substantial stone commercial blocks, two and three storeys high, gradually replaced the early frame buildings on St. Andrew Street West until a near-continuous streetscape of stone row buildings was formed, extending from St. David Street four blocks west to Breadalbane Street. Among the first to be built in 1858 was the Argo Block, a beautifully constructed, three-storey limestone block that is characteristic of the mid-century Classical Revival phase. As new stone blocks filled in the streetscape, each related to the other, but also added its own personality into the mix: gable or mansard roofs; two or three storeys high; and arches or pediments or both. By the 1880s, sandstone from the Credit Valley became the building material of choice, transported along a new rail connection to Cataract that opened in 1879. As seen in the 1883 Marshall Block, these High Victorian sandstone buildings injected a new sense of exuberance and drama to the more traditional limestone streetscape. Collectively, the business district of Fergus offers a delightful variety of Victorian Era fashions.

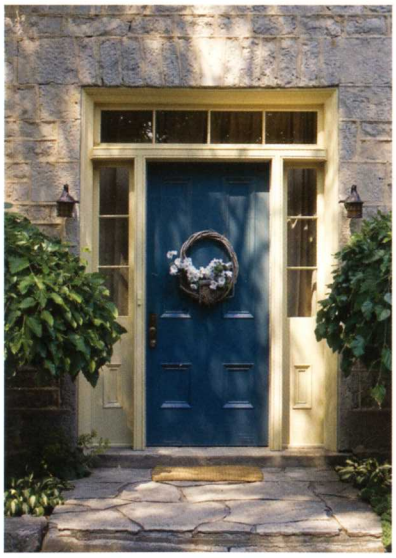
During this same period, several churches designed in the Gothic Revival style and constructed in stone also made their appearance in

Fergus, including St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in 1865 and the Melville United Church (formerly Free Presbyterian) in 1900. In a Scottish town such as Fergus, however, it was the established Presbyterian Church that took precedence. The first one built (a frame structure in 1834) was situated on a prestigious hilltop site at the head of James Square. Less than three decades later, the Auld Kirk re-asserted its prominence by erecting a new St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on the same site in 1862. Constructed in limestone and designed in the full-

Left: The smooth, tightly fitted ashlar blocks and elegant carving around the windows of the 1858 Argo Block set high standards for the transformation of Fergus's main street into a downtown of handsome stone buildings.
Right: The Marshall Block, built in Fergus in 1883, capitalized on the new availability of Credit Valley sandstone and features the Second Empire style in its octagonal corner tower, mansard roof, and decorative dormers.



Above and right: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church manse, built in 1856 in Fergus, is typical of the work of Scottish masons: decoration is not found in exterior embellishments, but in the texture of the stone and the beauty of the masonry.
Upper right: The 1858 Rennie Cottage of Fergus was first owned by William Rennie, a farmer-turned-builder, and is one of seven similar neighbouring houses. Built in the Ontario Cottage style, it represents a building form of pleasing proportions that was popular among skilled workers.



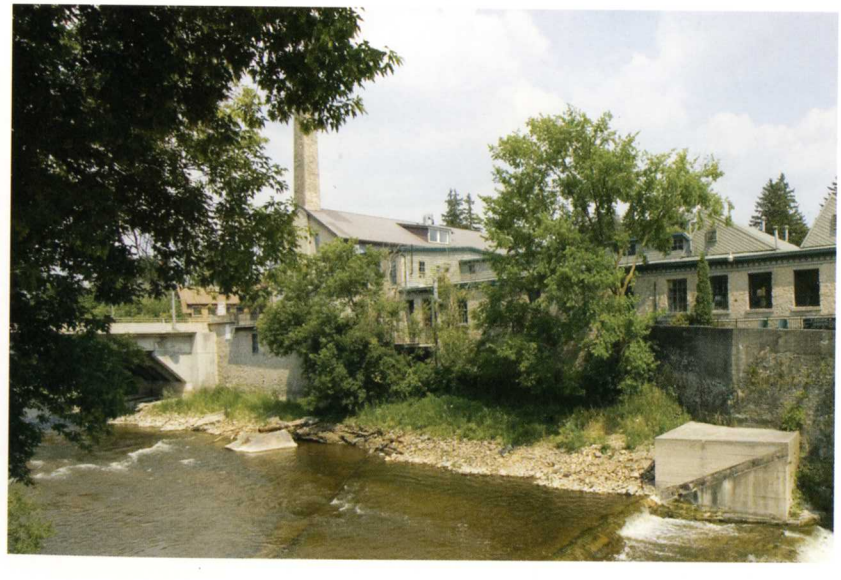
blown Gothic Revival style, the new structure featured a corner tower and broach spire that still reigns over the town below.

Typically the original houses in Fergus were of log construction, but the first stone house in town is said to have been constructed in 1840. Starting in the 1850s, a mix of stone homes began to appear; often the larger ones populated the higher slopes while the smaller, one-storey cottages were usually built near the Grand River. A beautiful old home built in 1856, St. Andrew's manse represents the early phase of stone house building in Fergus. The residence has a gracious presence and captures the very essence of fine proportions and simplicity of line, characteristic of this period. By contrast, the 1868 Rennie Cottage located near the river represents the one-storey Ontario Cottage style: modest in size and popular among skilled craftsmen and labourers. Typical characteristics are the hip roof and central entrance, with a nod to the Italianate style detected in the doorway's arches and colonnettes. The historic residential sections of town reveal a splendid array of house

styles, shapes, and sizes that were built of stone throughout the nineteenth century. Successful merchants tended to favour the south side of the river, building grand homes with handsome landscaped gardens, many of which still exist.

On September 13, 1870, the Great Western Railway began regular service in Fergus, completing the connection from Hamilton via Guelph and Elora. At the rousing opening-day ceremony, sponsor Adam Brown from Hamilton predicted "the banks of your beautiful river will soon be musical with the hum of busy industry." The railroad did attract new industries to town, both water-powered and later steam-powered. Among the notable industries of Fergus were a sewing machine factory, a brewery, planing mill, Watson's Tannery at the bridge, James Wilson's Monkland Mills — famous for its production of oatmeal (which was exported to Scotland) — and the 1879 Beatty Brothers Foundry located by the river in the heart of town (now a popular retail centre called the Fergus Market). These last three buildings still exist, and all have been adapted to new uses. Typical of the large-scale nineteenth-century industrial structures, the foundry was constructed of local limestone and heavily mortared; the windows were over-sized to let in natural light; and the building was strictly functional with no applied decoration. Similar to other small towns of the Grand River valley, Fergus's industrial boom was subject to fire, flooding, and, in some cases, a general over-production (at one point sewing machines sold for as little as $10.00 each.) By the end of the nineteenth century, the town still possessed a few industries, including the Monkland Mills and the Beatty Brothers, enterprise, but was evolving basically into a rural market centre.

Neither Fergus nor Elora has major historic county buildings; however, located between the two villages is a prestigious public building that was the former Wellington County House of Industry

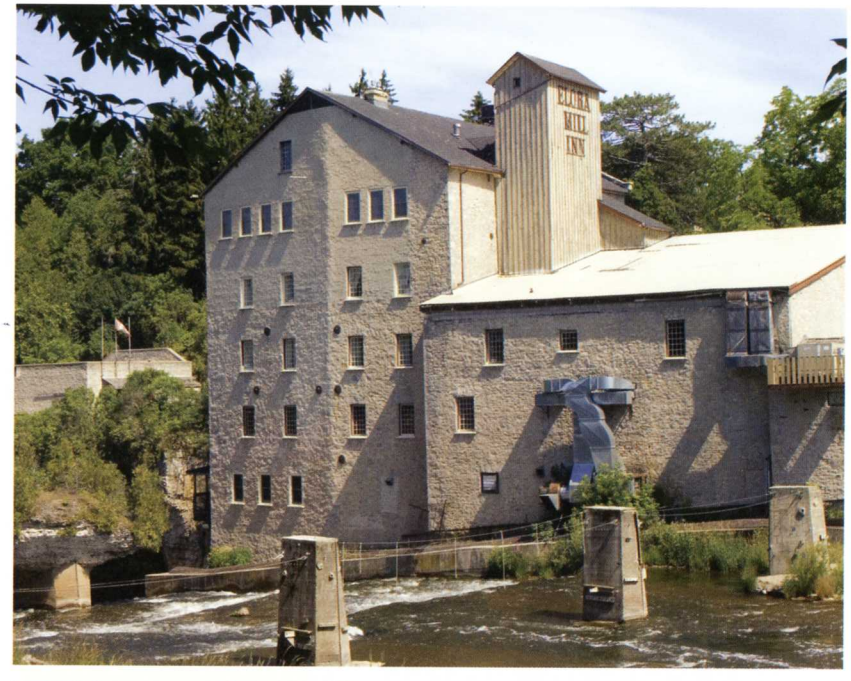


The Beatty Brothers Foundry of Fergus was built on the banks of the Grand River in 1879. It forms a striking industrial complex of connected structures, distinguished by its tall chimney stack and massive stone-gabled structure.

The 1877 House of Industry and Refuge, a National Historic Site, was designed by Guelph architect Victor Stewart in the Italianate Revival style. Noteworthy are its prominent belfry tower and rough-faced limestone construction. It now serves as the Wellington County Museum and Archives.

and Refuge, built in 1877. The plaque honouring its recognition as a National Historic Site explains just how rare a building it is in Canada today: it is "the earliest surviving example of an important nineteenth-century institution—the government-supported poorhouse". Its survival may be partly attributed to its appearance—a handsome stone structure that looks more like a Victorian school than a Dickensian poorhouse—and to its beautiful hilltop setting in the rolling countryside of the Grand River valley. Its conversion into the Wellington County Museum and Archives in the 1970s is recognized as a model project for surplus public buildings worthy of saving.

Compared to Fergus, growth in Elora was more measured. Most of its stone buildings were erected before the late 1870s when brick became the favoured building material in the village. Elora's riverfront also attracted mills and by 1846 had sixteen enterprises. The most prominent one to survive in stone was a flour mill, known as the Elora Mill, located on the site of the town's first saw mill of 1833. After a fire in 1859 destroyed an 1856 stone structure, owner J. M. Fraser, a fearless and ambitious Scot, immediately hired a team of thirty Scottish stonemasons to rebuild the mill, but again, after a fire in 1866 and another in 1870, it needed at least partial rebuilding. Rising out



the water like a rocky cliff, the Elora Mill formed a massive square block, measuring over eighteen metres on each side, with a run of six millstones. Although J. M. Fraser's empire went bust in 1875 and the mill's riverside wall partially collapsed in 1903, the picturesque mill has proven heroically durable, and in the 1970s was successfully converted into the Elora Mill Inn and Restaurant.

In the 1860s and 1870s, with a population still under two thousand inhabitants, Elora developed a small row of shops on Mill Street West near the mill. The monumental rebuilding of Fraser's stone mill in 1859 may well have been the catalyst. It is not surprising, then,

Above and right: The charming shops on Mill Street West adjacent to the Elora Mill were built of limestone in the 1860s and 1870s. Some have riverside balconies. Upper right: The Elora Mill, built in 1859 and rebuilt in 1870 after a fire, rises thirty-one metres from base to peak. Its massively thick walls of local limestone were built to withstand flooding and vibrations of the milling equipment.

Top: The Drew House in Elora began as a one-storey stone Regency cottage of the 1850s, then evolved into a two-storey Italianate house during the 1860s, and acquired a Gothic Revival complex on the garden side in the 1870s. Bottom: Due to its rarity, high standard of design, and limestone construction, the 1865 Elora Drill Shed is designated a National Historic Site. This well-proportioned building had many different community uses and now serves as a LCBO store.

to find local limestone used for many of the structures, forming a nucleus of traditional stone rowhouses. In its heyday, these shops provided the basic necessities of life until the 1880s when services and retail shops started migrating up Metcalfe Street to form a new village centre built primarily of brick. After languishing for nearly a century in residential use, Mill Street reinvented itself into an attractive specialty shopping district for arts, crafts, and antiques when the Elora Mill was converted.

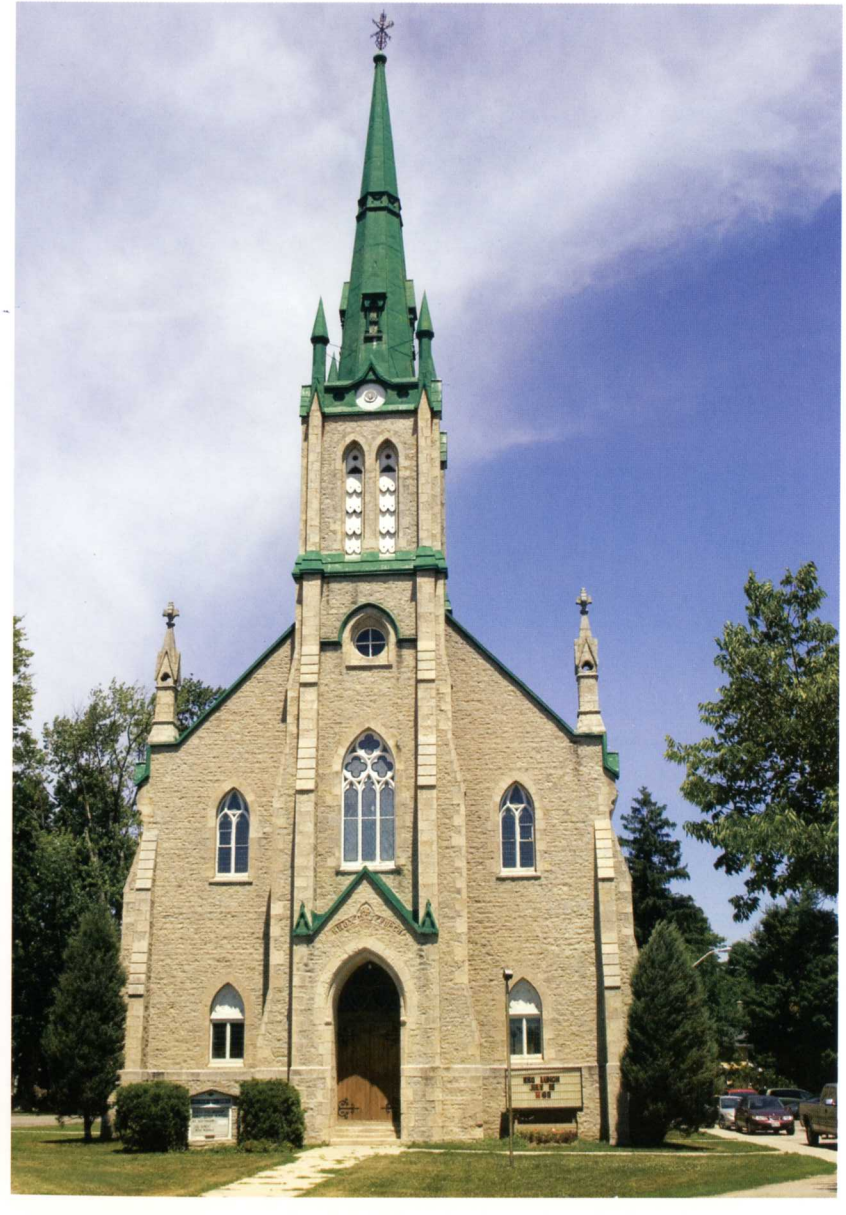
Enough wealth was generated in Elora around the mid-century mark that prominent houses began to appear throughout the village, when stone was still the favoured building material. One of the more notable examples is the Drew House, which, on close inspection, shows it was constructed over all three decades, from the 1850s to the 1870s, displaying a parade of architectural fashions under one roof. Stealing the limelight is a three-sided, intricately decorated veranda, which adds a Victorian flair to the mix, while the limestone walls remained suitably subdued in the background. While some of the larger residences were built by merchants and mill owners, the Drew House is named after a lawyer, George Drew, an early settler who bought the one-storey home in the 1860s and expanded it as his star rose and he became the area's first Conservative member of Parliament sent to Ottawa in 1867. As the economy flourished in the late 1860s and early 1870s, successful merchants built substantial new houses. The most exceptional of these houses was Rosemount Cottage, built in the early 1870s for the hardware merchant William Knowles. The stonework is so outstanding that local tradition maintains the unknown mason had worked on the royal castle of Balmoral, Scotland. Rosemount Cottage represents a full-blown example of the Italianate Revival style, a style that gives stonecarvers ample license to excel in their art. With its tall proportions, sculptured architectural features, and garden setting, Rosemount Cottage is a gem of the Italianate movement.

Events outside the small village and even outside British North America have sometimes left a visible trace on the townscape. Fears of Fenian Raids and general concerns generated by the American Civil War led to building more than one hundred drill sheds across the country for

training volunteer militia. Elora's is one of only two examples that survive from the original one hundred. Built with funds raised by the community, Elora's 1865 Drill Shed took the form of a permanent and dignified public building built of local limestone in contrast to the more commonly built, cheaper wooden versions. Once the military threat to the border was over by 1870, the drill shed was used continuously as a community centre and Armory Hall. In 1972, it was converted into a most impressive LCBO store, which would no doubt shock those past lecturers of the Temperance Movement who once spoke here.

Even a small village such as Elora joined the province-wide church building movement of the 1870s. Four major churches — Roman Catholic, Anglican, Free Presbyterian, and Knox Presbyterian — were inspired to erect new structures during that decade. All four structures were different, and all are still standing today. Knox Presbyterian Church was built in stone and featured a tall central tower, an ideal form for its location in the centre of Church Square. The agonizing tale of building a beautiful (and expensive) new church in a small place like Elora in the 1870s is well-documented in the *History of Knox Presbyterian Church, Elora, 1837–1987.* Reverend McDonald convinced the Great Western Railway to transport stone from Guelph at half price so they could proceed with construction. The church was completed in 1873 and is still a much loved village landmark.

The stone heritage of Fergus and Elora provides a significant insight into the two communities. To the largely Scottish population of Fergus, stone seemed to be an integral part of the community character and source of civic pride as revealed in its widespread and long-term use as well as in the high quality of craftsmanship found in its durable traditional buildings. Elora's more limited use of stone from the 1850s to the 1870s gives us a glimpse into the brief, but critical turning point when the village came of age as a successful mill settlement in the Grand River valley.



Knox Presbyterian Church was built in 1873 using stone transported from Guelph. The unusually tall, narrow proportions and clean perpendicular line of the centre tower and spire resulted in a delightfully vertical composition.

Afterword

The years of the 1850s through the 1870s marked the heyday for building in local stone in southwestern Ontario. The period saw the transformation of pioneer settlements into stable, responsible communities under the leadership of the first- and second-generation settlers. By the 1850s, the founding fathers had accumulated sufficient wealth to create the type of community they had envisioned for posterity. It was a vision that relied heavily on the cultural preferences they had brought with them: for stone and certain architectural fashions. The stonemasons of this founding era similarly had brought with them the high level of the skills and craftsmanship that were the traditions of their homelands.

Beginning in the 1880s, there was a shift in the building industry in southwestern Ontario. Brick had become more fashionable and cheaper; where it wasn't produced locally, it could be easily transported by rail. Stone was typically used for high-profile public structures such as government buildings and churches. In these cases, the use of imported stone—sandstone from the Credit Valley, for example—became a popular trend. As the demand for locally quarried stone dropped off, there wasn't enough business to sustain those quarries specializing in building stone; some had already run out of usable stone. As a result, building in stone became more expensive; younger masons generally turned to brick or moved on. Stylistically, there was a change in favour of the more rustic, rock-faced masonry that did not require the high level of skill of first-generation stonemasons.

Exceptions to these trends seemed to concentrate in those areas where stone construction was the most popular and where stone was still widely available. The stone towns of Fergus, Guelph, Galt, and St. Marys carried on building in local stone throughout the nineteenth century and, in some cases, into the first decade of the twentieth century. Imitation cast stone became competitive after the turn of the century. By then, the use of reinforced concrete and steel skeletons began to take over, and stone was reduced mainly to a facing material, with Queenston limestone being among the most popular. Modern technology had displaced traditional stone construction; in effect, it was the final step in bringing to a close this chapter in Ontario's architectural history.

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A FASCINATION WITH THEIR AGELESS QUALITY,
STRENGTH, AND ENDURANCE,




AND WITH THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE STONE ITSELF.

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