

Case History

FRAME ~ UP

It took a real enthusiast like Roy Stevens to see the redeeming qualities of the old hotel in the Prince Edward county village of Consecon, Ontario. The aging timber-frame inn had stood abandoned for years, a victim of the temperance movement and the general economic malaise that affected many a small milltown. Left to the vandals and the elements, it seemed hardly a window remained in place; a serious sag had developed in the roof; a thicket of weeds disfigured the site. Barely visible on the facade was a faded, but once-proud sign reading 'Porter's Hotel'.

But Roy, with a strong sense of local history, could see beyond the decay: in its sheer size and symmetry, the old hostelry had an undeniable presence, and much of its architectural detail—doorcase mouldings and a panelled cornice, for instance—was still there to behold. Casual exploration revealed other delights and a surprising solidity in construction. The latter held special interest for Roy, who had long been fascinated by carpentry techniques, especially in older furniture and vintage buildings. It wasn't long until he set his mind to seeing the building preserved.

That was in 1966. Today, twenty-one years and countless hours later, the inn has been re-erected on the family property in Waupoos, some thirty miles distant at the opposite end of the county. It was only in recent years that Roy and

his wife, Marg, moved in, and as yet the interior remains unfinished. None the less, their story is an inspiration to old-house enthusiasts, and for anyone who has contemplated moving a period home to new location, they have good advice.

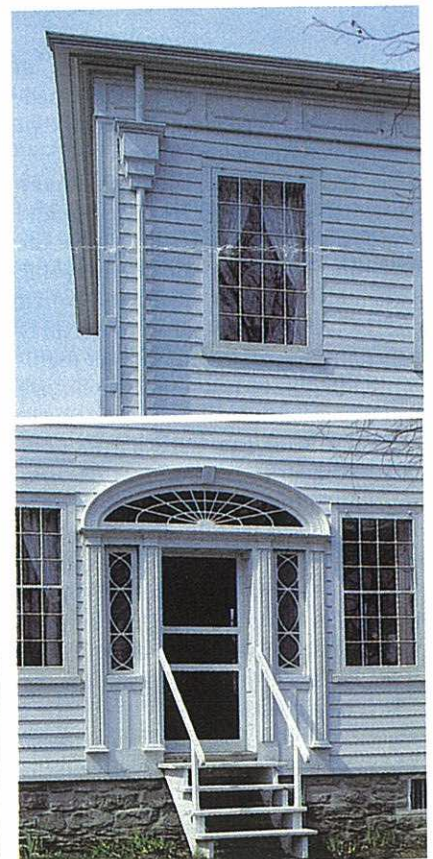
Demolition: Circumstances did not permit restoration of the hotel on its original site in Consecon; in fact, relocation proved to be the only feasible alternative, but in some ways, a last resort. After all, is the historical significance of a building compromised when it is moved to a new site? What about its aesthetic relationship to neighbouring structures? To what extent should the reconstruction emulate the original?

TOP: From ruin to renewal: today the old hotel proudly stands on a new site, its Greek-inspired dignity restored, painted white as Greek Revival structures often were.

RIGHT: Rainfall drains along the cornice gutter (hidden behind eaves), where it is conducted to the downspout. Rainwater head is a homemade repro based on historical precedents. Note also the panelled cornice, a bold and unusual embellishment for the 1830s. Full-size window is a storm; 'period' sash are yet to be completed.

The doorcase has a grand countenance. Fanlight and sidelights had long since disappeared, so present glazing pattern is based on remnants of the original as well as known stylings of other 1830s buildings. Steps are only temporary, pending the design of a more suitably-sized landing.

The inspirational saga
of the resurrection
of a proud clapboard inn,
refurbished
for residential use.



Such were the thoughts that occurred at the time, but when faced with a move or outright demolition, the Stevens, of course, chose the former. Upon negotiation with the owners, Roy was given the rights to the building and six weeks to clear the site.

At this stage, things had to progress quickly and basic decisions had to be made. Some thought was given to moving the building as a whole on a flatbed truck, but steep hills, overhanging trees and narrow bridges obscured the way. Also considered was an ambitious scheme to float the house on a barge through the Bay of Quinte, but that, too, was found impractical.

Instead, the hotel would be dismantled piece by piece, beam by beam, according to a well-considered sketch-plan. "We treated the building like a book". A room-by-room sequencing of labels was followed: each room was given a letter ('A', 'B', 'C', etc.), each wall was assigned a number and similarly, every piece of trim was marked with a number also. Hence, a baseboard in the drawing room was inventoried as, say, 'A-1-3'. Scribed in a notebook and labelled on site, every baseboard, rafter, floorboard, joist, door and moulding was accurately recorded and ready for careful demolition.

With the help of friends and a few hired hands, slowly the old hotel came down. First the plaster was removed (photos and plaster samples were taken to document decorative medallions and cornice mouldings for eventual reconstruction), then the interior trim, roof and rafters, until finally, all that remained was the skeletal frame.



On its original site, 'Porter's Hotel' seemed a lost cause by 1965. Even so it was still an impressive building, worthy of recycling. Despite neglect, the original building (right) had weathered the years far better than the later addition (note serious sag in roof).

Revealed for the first time was a fascinating historical aspect, as the hotel displayed a rare and early method of construction known as 'post-and-beam bent'. Framed like a barn, the hotel boasted twelve 'bents' (a typical barn might have four or five), each composed of an H-shaped arrangement of upright posts and horizontal beams which run from the front to the back of the building. Each member is a massive, hewn timber, mortised and tenoned into place with far more rigidity than the structure actually requires. This may explain why, despite years of neglect, the hotel had remained in good condition while later conventionally-framed additions had decayed beyond repair. It was this aspect that impressed Roy the most, and for him, reconstructing the hotel using the old bents was naturally a priority.

Research: In the process of dismantling, the date '1837' was found etched under a door frame. Likewise, a rafter bore graffiti to the effect that "Richard

Hayes is a rogue and a liar". Research through land titles has shown Hayes to have been the innkeeper who built the hotel, although little else is known about him. He favoured a grand style, as the architectural detail, resplendent in Greek Revival finery, boasts a confident opulence. The hotel changed hands several times over subsequent years and to this day, the best known proprietor is Robert Porter, owner at the turn of the century. It was likely he who expanded the hotel, adding the wing to the side, curiously using recycled trim from an earlier period.

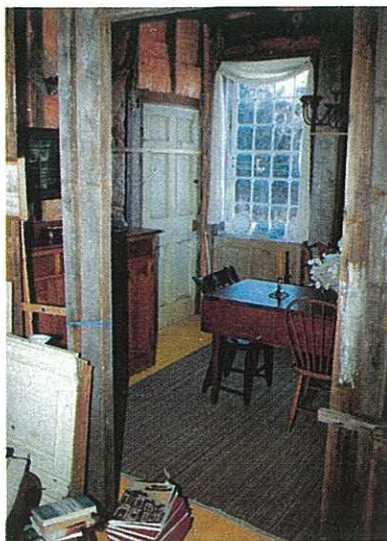
For the Stevens, such investigation proved useful. It was decided not to reconstruct the later wing, and the discovery of the date of construction helped in determining the stylings for missing details. Besides, that sense of history added a romantic touch to the reconstruction, as the Stevens contemplated what prompted the carpenters to leave behind such negative sentiments about Mr. Hayes. For fun, Roy and Marg have hidden notes of their own for future renovators to discover.

Assessment: Time had taken a severe toll on the old hotel; and a discouraging amount of lumber, rotted with damp, had to be discarded. But because the wing was not included in the reconstruction, lots of clapboard and sawn lumber was salvaged for re-use. Unfortunately, some of the bents themselves showed signs of decay, and although they may have sufficed, it was decided that five be replaced. After all, Roy wants the hotel to last for another 150 years.

Storage and Preparation: Thus began the search for 'new' bents. Several years passed, but undaunted, suitable hewn timbers were eventually found as several local barns were demolished. Meanwhile, the rest of the building still lay in pieces, neatly catalogued and protected from the elements. A foundation was dug, one of the few aspects of the project to be contracted out, and a concrete-

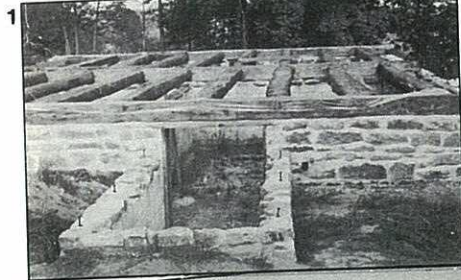


Treasures among tribulations: plastering and restoration of painted parlour panels are among the most pressing tasks still to be completed, yet the Stevens' traditional furnishings already look at home in their resurrected surroundings.

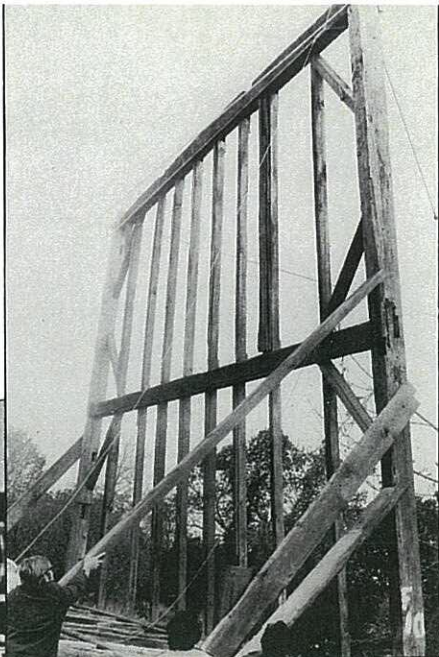


FRAME-UP

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1. Foundation was readied well in advance of reconstruction. Note limestone masonry above-ground, concrete block below. Here, floor beams are in place with floor 'plates' (timber resting directly on foundation in the traditional manner) awaiting the house-raising bee.

2. A hard day's work: the first bent in place. The larger beams (in H-shape) form the bent, which is the basis for this barn-like method of framing. The bent runs from front to back of the building; in fact, this one forms the end wall.

3. Men at work: neighbours and friends gathered for an old-style 'bee' to lend their collective muscle in raising the frame structure.

4. Taking shape: along the facade, you can count the 12 bents. With roof and window frames in place, the clapboard was then applied.

5. Viewing the interior as a shell offers an interesting lesson in 19th-century construction. The basic structure of the bents is quite evident.



4



3



lows the original layout of rooms from the 1830s, although, upstairs too many changes had occurred to discern the precise location of the first partitions. The arrangement lends an inviting sense of tradition, and many of the interior appointments have been recycled, including the staircase, doors, pine floors and trim mouldings.

Although the family has moved into their renewed home, the project is far from complete; still at hand are a number of decorative tasks, not the least of which is the restoration of an extraordinary series of oil paintings found on the parlour panelling beneath several layers of overpainting. But why hurry? The house continues to be a labour of love for Marg and Roy and when finished, the restored former hotel will offer a warmly authentic atmosphere. The Stevens' story offers a remarkable inspiration that ably shows how a deserving old building can be given new life. Their example, assisted with a healthy dose of community spirit, displays the rewards of devotion and hard work. □

block basement constructed. Above ground level, the foundation walls were finished in local limestone, adopting the traditional look.

The new site was chosen with care, facing south from a high point on the property. From its commanding prospect, the old inn has come to dominate Waupoos, lending the hamlet an architectural focus sure to catch the eye.

The Bee: In October of 1973, following the ancestral tradition, the Stevens held a bee to erect their treasured house. Like an old-time barn-raising, Marg started baking a week ahead of time to feed all the friends and neighbours who gathered to help; indeed the raising of the first bent was a memorable event for everyone.

It took the strength of nine men as Bent No. 1 was assembled on the ground and then hoisted onto the foundation with a system of ropes and pulleys at-

tached to a tractor. One of the 'pulleys' was the crotch of a nearby tree, and to everyone's horror, the weight of the bent was enough to snap off a limb; luckily, the crew had better luck with a second tree. Before long the frame was taking shape. Working as time permitted, the rafter-truss system was the next component to be refitted. Subsequently came the eavestroughs, roofboards, clapboard, floors and interior partitions.

The Stevens' project caught the attention of noted restorationist Peter John Stokes, who lent invaluable advice regarding stylistic intricacies for items such as the doorcase. He also offered suggestions for the repair of the 'cornice gutter' (the built-in wooden eavestrough found on stylish old buildings, but notorious for premature rot). The high-tech solution: line the trough with an impervious butyl membrane.

As reconstructed, the floor plan fol-

The Basics:

Structure: Recycled timber-frame in post-and-beam bent construction. Clapboard cladding. Concrete block foundation; above ground level, visible foundation is local cut-limestone.

Heat: Individually-controlled wall-mounted electric heaters.

Insulation: Roof—R50, Walls—R20, fibreglass batts, most interior partitions included.

Electricity: 200 amp service, self-installed with help from qualified electrician.

Walls: Plaster applied to plasterboard.