

A COMMUNITY LANDMARK AWAITS ITS FATE



THE TOWN HALL on December 8, 1962, a few hours after the township government had moved the last of its equipment to its new 11-mile headquarters. The shades are drawn, the doors are locked. Only the pigeons remained on the afternoon that this photo was taken. They called plaintively, as if they, too, understood that a era had passed.



A PHOTOGRAPHER by the name of Pesha took this shot sometime after 1914. The back portion of the Town Hall was added that year. Note the third entrance, unused today, on the Grand River side. The detail of the original was carried out exactly on the addition, even

to the patterned design on the slate roof which, unfortunately, is not clearly visible in any of the photos. The picture postcard was a gift by Police Chief Joseph G. DeVriendt to Mr. Harley Walters of the Historical Society.



INSTEAD OF THE carved name of the township supervisor or the name of the governor or the U.S. president, the tablet, clearly above the main entrance, shows the name of the builder, J. S. Prall, and the year of construction. Who J. S. Prall was and what else he built is shrouded in history. Oldtimers may be able to help on this.

Victorian With French Renaissance

THE ARCHITECTURE? — "What is it? And is it any good? Like most architecture of most buildings, the design of the Town Hall is not "pure" anything. It is Victorian with French Renaissance adaptations. How such a concoction ended up in Farmington, only the builder, J. S. Prall, could tell us. But it was, and is, not uncommon in this country or in any country for builders to get their ideas from books of drawings and make up their own adaptations from these. Even Thomas Jefferson copied his designs, but gave to Monticello, and to his other buildings, certain Jeffersonian modifications. So it is with the Town Hall.

Basis for the label Victorian is not obscure. Victorian is a term applied to many phases of architecture which happened to develop during Queen Victoria's reign. The tower, the corbels, the arched doorways, the intricate detailing along the roof line, the dormers with their ornateness are all Victorian.

The French Renaissance influence may be less well-known and probably more difficult to trace. The roof is a Mansard roof. Mansard was a Parisian who conceived of the slanted roof with windows as a way to tuck an extra floor into a building without actually raising the overall height of

the building very much. Paris officials decreed in the early 1600's that no building in the city could be above a certain number of stories. Mansard got around the ruling by designing the roof which has come to bear his name. The Owens House, now the Elks Lodge, on the north side of Grand River near Farmington Road is another illustration of a Mansard roof.

Some may wonder: Why the tower? Well, any building that was a building in 1876 had to have a tower. It was a mark of distinction. Many houses, even, boasted of towers, and though they were more ornamental

than functional, they did receive limited usage as places to converse or merely to view the landscape.

But back to the original question: Is it good? Is modern good? Are masses of glass and concrete good? Or will the exigencies of time and changing fashion make them as old hat as Greek Revival or Victorian or Gothic? Very likely. But that is not quite the point. The point is that the Town Hall represents, outspokenly and incontrovertibly, a segment of our historical and architectural development. As such, the building should not be destroyed—unless we wish to destroy history.

Focal point of a community-wide controversy for well over a year is this building, the Farmington Township Hall, built 87 years ago in 1876.

The controversy centers on what to do with the building now that its principal user, the Township, has moved to its new headquarters at 31555 11-Mile Road.

This edifice—imposing whether you like its architecture or not—has been a partner of a most peculiar marriage, a marriage of the Masons, Farmington Township, and the City of Farmington. The City owns 15 per cent of the property; the Township 65 per cent; and the Masonic Lodge 20 per cent.

The Township, having used the building for some 80 odd years, would like now to get somewhere around \$65,000 for its share (It cost a little more than \$4000 to build.) The Masons do not want to buy the building on the Township's concept of value; nor does the City. And thus the dilemma.

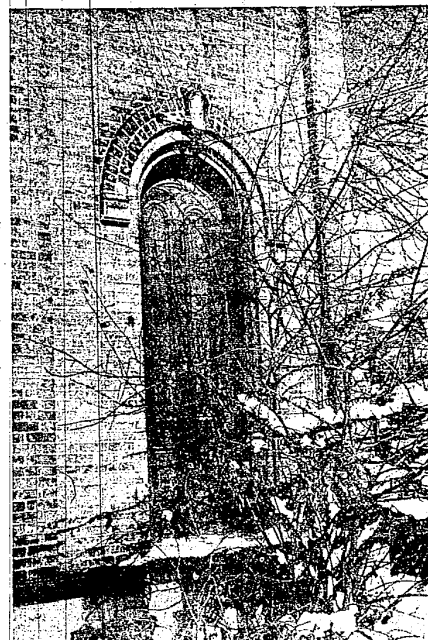
No effort will be made here to review all of the discussion and action that has taken place over the past year, but of major concern to all the persons who favor saving the Hall as a historic landmark and a community meeting hall is the next meeting of the City Planning Commission scheduled for next Monday, January 14. The Commission composed of Mrs. Craig Porter, Mr. Wilbur Brotherton, Mr. Bayard Tupper, Mr. John Allen, Mr. Hugo Peterson, Mr. Wil-

liam Burke, Mr. Richard Davidoff, Mr. Ralph Yoder, and Mr. Carl Boehnke will make a decision that night about rezoning the property. Presently the property is zoned R-1 Parking.

The Township wants the property rezoned commercial in order to increase its value and subsequent monetary benefit to them. The Township appraisal has been based on the assumption that the property would become commercial. This appraisal figure has not been revealed to the general public in spite of the protestations by many of this questionable ethics on the part of the Township.

A proposed solution to the situation is that the City purchase the building, renovate it, and act as the leasing agent of its facilities. That the City has just such a right is no question. The City Council authorized expenditures of \$82,500 of tax money recently to build a new Municipal Building and it obviously has the authority to purchase the Town Hall and to levy taxes to support its administration.

Though many individuals and many groups have expressed interest in the building and taken the stand that the Town Hall should remain, all the forces at hand may not stay the swing of the wreckers' ball and cable, particularly so, if the Planning Commission gives a green light to rezoning next Monday night.

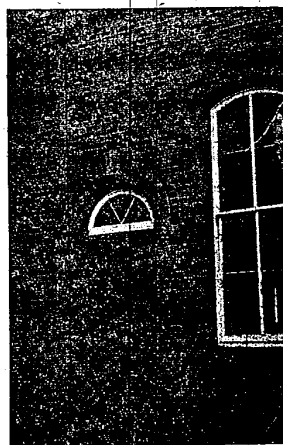


THE LITTLE-NOTICED, unused south entrance to the Town Hall possesses a stately arched door, probably the only original outside door remaining. The main entrance doors have been replaced, as a comparison of the photos at top left will show. Behind the door is the room which, for a number of years, was used as a makeshift kitchen. If the building is saved, the sagging bush obscuring the door should be removed and this handsome door made usable again.

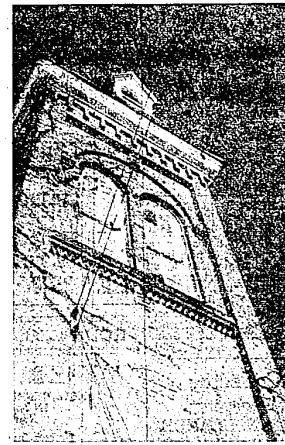


TWO FEATURES OF the building which make it an interesting example of the construction of former years are the intricately and delicately detailed dormers and the corbels (or brackets) which underpin the roof overhang. The brackets, carefully detailed too, surround the entire building along the

eaves. Ornamentation of this sort was common on public and private buildings of the period. The pseudo-French iron work appearing as ornamental treatment on many of the subdivision houses in Farmington today is an illustration of the attempt by builders to return to a former day.



THE ENTRANCE WAY to the former Township Library before its move to its present quarters. The Township last used this area of the building for office space to print the tax forms. The 1914 addition, of which this wing is a part, kept the arched doorway as illustrated above, right.



THIS VIEW OF THE TOWER from the Grand River side was taken to show the small tablet with the words "Masonic Lodge, No. 5876." The Masons, who use the upper floor of the hall for their meetings, use the entrance further to the left of this tower.