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To the Mayor and Members of London City Council:

RE: Application for demolition of house at 759 Elizabeth Street

I am writing as a professional heritage consultant, having written two books on Ontario architecture, published by university presses, and having worked for numerous clients over many parts of Ontario, to refute some claims made in the report written on behalf of the proponents regarding the property at 759 Elizabeth Street. I wish to commend the structural analysis of the cottage contained in Mark Hall's report, which concludes that "the basic existing building is in relatively sound structural condition and in sound repair." But I also dispute his conclusions in two areas:

1. Regarding date of construction. Mr. Hall's report is actually rather vague about this important consideration. On page 2 he observes that "759 Elizabeth Street was constructed on the present site as a relatively modest farm building, likely in the latter part of the 19th century." On page 6, basing his conclusions on the registered plans produced between 1880 and 1904, he implies that the house was constructed near the latter date. Such an assumption is blatantly fallacious. The amazing fact is that the building is shown in 1904; registered plans do not commonly show buildings.

In general, Hall seems to accept and further distort his client's confused research findings. He seems to conflate "historical maps" and "land registry office archives." His assumptions about directories are equally illogical. City directories began recording addresses in this area in 1907-1908 and it began indicating positions in the area (e.g. s of Oxford, e Adelaide) as early as 1884. Through painstaking studies of the directories, historian Janet Hunten has shown that George Brown, caretaker of Carling's Farm, lived there as early as 1884 or 1885. One cannot conclude that no building was there just because the directories had not started recording in the area.

2. About the term 'Regency Cottage': Mr. Hall takes issue with the staff's use of the term 'Regency Cottage.' He is right to associate the term 'Regency' with architectural elegance, but the term 'Regency Cottage' has taken on another meaning as 'a form of cottage that originated in the Regency period (very early nineteenth century).' That the Elizabeth Street cottage does not have such elegant features as a centre-hall plan, nine-foot ceilings, and symmetrical chimneys in fact supports its identification as an authentic pioneer cottage, breaking the 'rules' because of ignorance or backwoods practicality.

In fact, several architectural features of the cottage determine its pre-Confederation date, argue for its being the cottage on the property owned by Charles Henry in the 1861 Census, and suggest that it was probably built by Henry in the 1850s or before. They include the straight "arch" created by the brick voussoirs above the windows; the common height, close to the eaves, of the front windows and doors; the 6/6 windows and the relatively narrow muntin bars; the shallow hipped roof with a pronounced ridge line; and the elongated Grecian Ogee and Bevel curve still to be found in some interior mouldings. The Regency -- or Ontario -- Cottage form remained popular well into the twentieth century, but the particular characteristics of the cottage changed from one period to another. The cottage at 759 Elizabeth Street was not built in the late 19th or early 20th century.

London has many Ontario cottages, but no others in such intact condition possessing the features mentioned above. Thank you for giving serious consideration to its retention.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy Tausky
