

Information for LACH Agenda

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I began to work with the FSCPP towards the end of 2014, at the request of then Chair George McNeish and some other members of the committee who were worried that some work then being done on the Chapel was not in keeping with acknowledged heritage standards. During the first year of my firm's engagement with the Chapel, and in keeping with the work plan the committee approved, Hilary Neary, the senior researcher in my firm, George McNeish, and I undertook a careful study of the Chapel building; worked with a small committee undertaking research in connection with the Chapel; and recommended both a structural engineer, James Knight, and also three heritage architects who were interviewed, with the result that John Rutledge was hired as the architect for the project.

Our initial examination of the building showed, among other things, that the building was strongly constructed, with four bents providing structure at both ends and two midpoints, with studs between, and with joists at both the ground-floor and attic levels interlocked with cross beams. (Comments on the building's original solidity were also made by James Knight in his first report.) In addition, we were able to detect wainscoting along all four of the exterior walls, with the exception of those in the southwest room, where walls were replaced after a collapse caused by storing too many heavy kitchen appliances within the room during its twentieth-century history. This provided a negative answer to one of our most basic questions: did the chapel initially contain any room divisions? The wainscoting consists of three broad, beaded boards laid horizontally instead of in the vertical position more commonly found in this area. with the exception of those in the southwest room, where walls were replaced after a collapse caused by storing too many heavy kitchen appliances within the room during its twentieth-century history with the exception of those in the southwest room, where walls were replaced after a collapse caused by storing too many heavy kitchen appliances within the room during its twentieth-century history. An entirely unique characteristic is the use of battens underlying the original subflooring, still found in the northwest corner of the Chapel. It was also confirmed that parts of the sills, posts, studs, and floorboards had rotted, owing largely, we thought, to the fact that the ground level had been built up above the stone foundation while the building was still at its Thames Street site.

The historical committee (Tara Jenkins, Lindsay Kernohan, Hilary Neary, and myself) continued research on several aspects of the Chapel history: research into the state of the black community in London during the mid-nineteenth century; research into the architectural history of AME and BME churches; and Hilary's research into the history of the AME and BME churches and into the letters of the one-time rector at the Chapel, the Reverend Lewis Chambers (she is now working on an edition). We spent a great deal of time searching for visual images of the chapel on early views of London, following up on material Tara had included in the earlier study of the Chapel she used towards her certification in Cultural Heritage from the University of Victoria. Regrettably, none of these views provided any significant information about the early appearance of the Chapel, as it was either missing, hidden, or very vaguely drawn in each. The earliest image of the Chapel to show it with any precision is thus from a 1926 edition of the *London Advertiser*, after the building had served as a residence for nearly sixty years. Research continues in all areas, though we have determined that several AME/BME chapels in southern Ontario were shaped much like the Fugitive Slave Chapel in London.

Having determined, in consultation with the FSCPP and the former Heritage Planner in London that the Chapel interior should be returned to its original state, we have made significant progress during the period since 2015 in removing the layers of external and internal materials that had accrued to the structure since it was originally built. Work has involved repairs to the roof, the removal of all but the underlying tongue-and-groove planks on the side and rear exterior walls; further stripping of plaster, plasterboard, and wallpaper from all interior walls except for those in the southwest room (see below); removal of the east-west wall separating the east side of the building into two rooms; removal of remaining false ceilings throughout the house; and the removal of the interior east-west wall in the northwest corner of the building. Restored samples of wallpaper from the northeast room have been preserved in a volume now place in the Central branch of the LPL; other samples of wallpaper and

newspaper removed from the walls, along with other material samples, are currently in my office in the Grosvenor Lodge coach house awaiting further restoration and analysis.

Several mysteries pertaining to the structure and appearance of the Chapel have thus been solved. In addition to the discovery that it consisted of one large room, mentioned above, we have discovered that the seven windows were once the same, fairly large size, and, while symmetrically placed on the front and back, the two on the west side and one on the east seem to have been located simply for considerations of convenience. A third window on the west side, close to the back wall, is narrower and lower, and appears to have been located at a different time than were the other seven. A fourth, very small window on the west side appears to have been added when one of the western rooms was turned into a bathroom. The walls that cross interior space appear to have been added at different times, in this order: a north-south wall just west of the front door, east west walls built of vertical planks producing divisions into three rooms along the west side of the house; an east-west wall dividing the east part of the house into front and back rooms; and the east west wall creating a narrow closet in the northwest corner of the building. The absence of any marks seen after the removal of the added hardwood flooring in the northwest section of the house suggests that a building-wide podium was never constructed across the north part of the structure. The façade of the building was initially distinguished by the use of narrower boards than those along the sides and back.

Not all accrued materials have yet been removed. The north-south interior wall remains, as do the two east-west walls made of vertical planks. (These walls were retained because Pathways felt they were essential to the building's stability; we now know this is true only of the north-south wall.) The plaster board in the southwest room, some hardwood flooring, and the front wall coverings have been retained for the same reason.

While many questions about the appearance and construction of the original building have been answered, it is hoped that this further work will provide some illumination regarding others, such as the following:

1. Can we make any further discoveries about the appearance of the original façade of the building? E.g., might nail holes show the position of a plaque identifying the chapel?
2. Was there originally a back door, and, if so, where?
3. What were the original windows like? The interior window surrounds appear to postdate c. 1850 when the building was erected; were the window enlarged at some point?



Exposing the original wide tongue-and-groove planks of the east wall



Varieties of materials covering the rear (north) wall



Hilary Neary and Tara Jenkins stripping wallpaper from vertical planks between two rooms in the western portion of the house



Looking along the north-south wall as it extends towards the rear of the building