



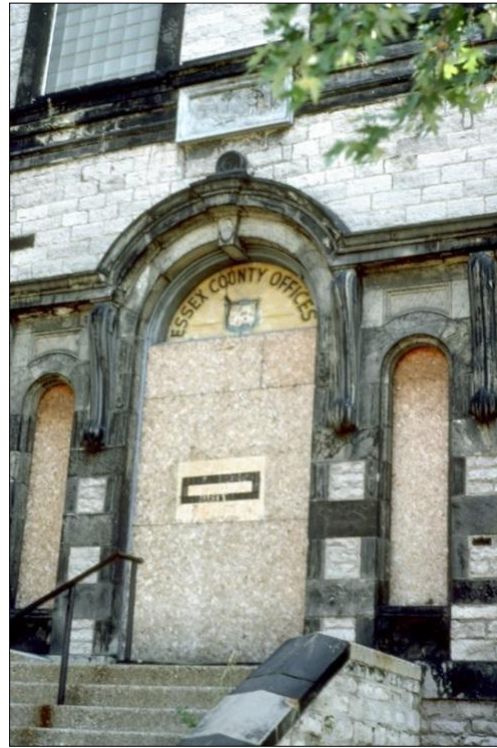
# The Friends of the Court (Mackenzie Hall, Windsor)

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A Report to the City of Windsor

2016

# Photo Gallery



*Top Left: Front Entrance 1980's, Top Right: Front Entrance with hoarding,  
Bottom Left: View of Courthouse 1978 (all three courtesy of E. McLean)*

**The Friends of the Court** is a small group of volunteers who came together almost forty years ago to find a new use for the then-vacant 1855 Essex County Courthouse.

An early source of funds was a half million dollar government grant that was available as a “make work” federal grant for which municipal governments were not eligible. An incorporated organization was required to hold and administer the grant.

The Friends of the Court (Mackenzie Hall, Windsor) was recognized as the organization that could fulfill the role. On April 22, 1982 the organization was registered. Its original By-law #1 was approved and Letters Patent with seal issued May 31, 1982. It was later appointed by City Council to be “the Advisory Body in regard to Mackenzie Hall”.

The Friends of the Court recognized the historical significance of this courthouse, in that the builder, Alexander Mackenzie, had later become Prime Minister of Canada. They suggested the new cultural centre be named Mackenzie Hall.

The first step the The Friends took was to undertake a feasibility study to determine the building’s condition, a recommendation by the local office of the Ontario Ministry of Culture & Recreation. The Friends set up an office, hired an administrator and entered into a contract for the clearing out of the interior. Then the search began for a heritage architect for the reconstruction work. With the support of City Council, Carlos Ventin of Simcoe was chosen to be the architect.

A capital campaign (which became an annual event) and fund raising by the group of volunteers brought in many donations which were used in major purchases including the Concert Grand Piano, as well as hardwood oak flooring in the Court Auditorium and the Main Gallery.

These and many other things, including the new cast-iron railings on the rebuilt front steps, have totalled over *One Million Dollars* in contributions by The Friends of the Court for the renovation of the historic Essex County Court House to become today’s Mackenzie Hall.

*The mission of The Friends of the Court is to promote, support and enhance Mackenzie Hall as a sustainable arts and culture centre for Sandwich community and Windsor.*



As early as 1978 the Essex County Historical Society, the Arts Council of Windsor & Region and several local theatre groups had expressed interest and initiated a study on the possibility of the vacated court house being used for cultural purposes.

In the beginning, the Friends gathered funds from many Foundations, groups and individuals, as well as from Government Grants, and set out to reconstruct and re-furbish the newly-empty 1855 Court House.

After much conversation and consideration, the City had agreed to buy the property and work began with the removal of the hundred-year-old slate roof, to be replaced with asphalt shingles.

For more than 100 years The Court House had been the centre of justice for everything from land claim disputes to murder trials. After the Courts moved to downtown Windsor in 1963, the building was used by Essex County Council until 1974, when the stone building was left empty and unheated.

Many features of the original court house were found and saved. The wooden roundel in the centre of the court room ceiling, originally intended to let air pass out of the room, was restored and is now used as a light box.



*Roundel and original tin ceiling in Court Auditorium (E. McLean c1980)*



*Roundel (photo courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography)*

The original fan-lights in the half-round transoms over the doors on the second floor were saved and remain today, with the imperfections of the glass from over a century ago.

The judge's bench and recorders' table from 1892, were returned from storage and installed in a new room located on the first floor, named for Judge Bruce Macdonald.



*Interior Court Room 1975 showing the blocked in windows and lowered ceiling to accommodate air conditioning ducts  
(Court Auditorium – archival photo)*



*Judge's bench and recorders' table now located in the Macdonald Room – photo courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography)*

Donations to The Friends of the Court provided funds for hardwood oak flooring in the Court Auditorium on the second floor, instead of the composite vinyl sheeting that was used to hide decades of damage to the original hardwood.



*Interior Court Auditorium – blocked in windows and lowered ceiling to accommodate air conditioning ducts c1981 (E. McLean)*



*Interior Court Auditorium 2016 (note restored windows, floor, and ceiling) – courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography*

When the courts had moved out, the court room was used by the Essex County Council with the tall elegant windows filled in with glass blocks which had been installed to cut out the noise and dirt from Sandwich Street.

The Friends also bought banquet tables and tweed-covered stacking chairs (the 200 chairs are still in remarkably good shape, after thirty-five years" of heavy use). The original cost of both the grand piano and the window coverings (blinds and draperies) had been raised by donations to The Friends of the Court in the following years.



Athena, a fabric art wall hanging by Robin Morey and Lampo Pazzo, by sculptor Joseph DeAngelis, an original sculpture lighting the hanging, are art pieces acquired through the donations to The Friends of the Court. The Friends also contributed to the cost of the steel beam support for Vinculum, by sculptor Spring Hurlbut.



*Top Left: View of Vinculum, Top Right: Athena and Lampo Pazzo, Bottom Right: Gazebo*

When the land next door became available, The Friends were able to contribute \$40,000 to help to create the park. A city owned gazebo now stands on the site.

The pressed tin ceiling in the second floor court room was not acceptable in light of today's fire code, but a modern replica, fabricated and produced at the original factory in Rolling Rock, Alabama, was provided for the Macdonald Room on the first floor, where the judge's Bench and matching wood work are now located. It was acquired with funds from donations to The Friends of the Court.



*Tin Ceiling in Macdonald Room – photos courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography*

Recent years" expenditures paid by The Friends, have included the restoration of the grand chandelier and the Oudot-Robinet Armoire in the second floor lobby, as well as the \$60,000 cost of the heritage cast-iron railings for the front entrances, installed in 2015.



*Grand chandelier, Oudot-Robinet Armoire, original fan-lights in the half-round transoms over the doors – photo courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography*



*'Celebrating a Step Up' May 24, 2015 Heritage cast-iron railings – photo courtesy of Merry Ellen Scully Mosna*

The Friends also spent over \$30,000 on repairs and restoration of the Grand Piano and replacement of the sun damaged window coverings throughout the building, particularly enhancing blackout in the Court Auditorium.

As a continuation of our mission, in 2016, with the help of the Parks and Communications Departments, The Friends of the Court initiated updating the grounds and landscape improvements. „The Mackenzie Hall Landscape Scholarship," in partnership with St. Clair College and the City of Windsor, was also initiated.



*Grand Piano in Court Auditorium upper level*

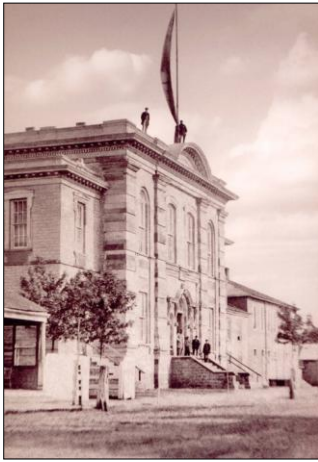
Funding was charitably assembled for a St. Clair College Horticultural student to give care to the gardens and grounds. The Friends acquired a magnificent pair of welcome urns and will continue to enhance the grounds with special landscape support materials and scholarship support.



*One of the two new urns – photo courtesy of C. Wilson*



# History of Mackenzie Hall



*Earliest-known photo of Essex County Court House, taken at time of opening in 1856 – archival (Carte de visite)*

Mackenzie Hall was built in 1855-1856 by Alexander Mackenzie, who became the second Prime Minister of Canada in 1873.



The self-educated Scottish stonemason was head of Mackenzie Builders of Port Sarnia at the time.

Mackenzie's experience with this and other notable building projects undoubtedly influenced his decision to assume the public works portfolio while he was Prime Minister. During this time he was responsible for an extensive program to encourage the building of appropriate public buildings across the country.

Formerly the Essex County Court House, this building is a symbol of the administration of justice during the province's early years. When Detroit gained independence from British rule in 1796, the British authority moved across the river, and Sandwich became the Legislative Seat of Government of the Western District of Upper Canada (Ontario).



*Essex County Court House 1863 – Archival photo*



*Recovered cornerstone – photo courtesy of S. Kriemadis Photography*

This structure is the fourth court building on the same site to serve the Western District and later Essex County. The first, an abandoned blockhouse, burned in 1797, and the second was burned by American troops during the War of 1812. A brick court house, completed in 1820, was used until this building opened in 1856. Signature stones for the architect and Mackenzie Builders flank the entry steps. As well, above the main door is the original seal of the County of Essex in stone.





*Original seal depicts a pioneer settler felling a tree near his small log cabin, to remind us that, in the early days, the great flatland of Essex county was once heavily wooded, with dense stands of hardwood and softwood forests.*

*It also reminds us what labour it took to make Essex county a fertile farmland  
– file photo*



*View of Court House and the attached Gaol on the right hand side of photo (site of hangings)  
c1927  
– archival photo*

The building was designed by prominent Detroit-based architect Albert H. Jordan, who incorporated Italianate (Tuscan Renaissance Revival) elements into the basically mid-Victorian Classical Revival architectural style that was prevalent in civic buildings at the time.

These elements are expressed in the rich texture of the exterior materials (rough-hewn limestone and sandstone trim), the symmetrically organized façade, the elevated first storey, the stylized classical detailing and the heavy cornice. Other noteworthy features on the front façade include the four pilasters, rounded segmental pediment, and Palladian style entrance.

The building has undergone a number of alterations over the years. In 1892, Mason and Rice, Detroit, remodelled the entire interior, including the furnishings, many of which are still utilized in the building today. Complementary interior furnishings and artifacts, which include the original 1855 cornerstone, antique silent wall clock from 1860, and golden oak Bench, witness box, barristers' table

and clerk's desk from 1892, reflect the building's original use and enhance its heritage and aesthetic values.

**The Friends of the Court  
(Mackenzie Hall, Windsor)**

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**Visit us at –**

**<https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Mackenzie-Hall-1012274185452862/>**

