

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: ?All the Gaudy Paraphernalia?

By Jacqueline Stuart

Back in August of 1856 the Time Traveller decided to mosey along Mosley Street to have a look at the piece of land which the local Methodist New Connexion congregation had just purchased. There was nothing much to be seen, which was not surprising as they had paid only \$150 for the property. But the Time Traveller had heard that a big-name Toronto architect, John G. Howard, had been hired to design a fine new church for the New Connexion. (Yes: it was spelled that way.)

Today, we are not absolutely certain that Mr. Howard was the architect of the building at number 16 Mosley Street. But there is no denying that it is the spitting image of a Methodist church which he designed in 1856 for a congregation in Willowdale. John G. Howard designed many churches, and the old ?999 Queen Street? provincial asylum, and Colborne Lodge, his own home in the centre of High Park in Toronto, and much else besides.

The New Connexion moved into their new quarters in March of 1857. They used the building until 1875 when they joined up with the mainstream Wesleyan Methodists, over on Yonge Street. The Mosley Street property was sold to another branch of the Methodist tree, the Primitive Methodists. In due course the Primitive Methodists also found their way to the Wesleyans, and once again the grand edifice on Mosley Street was for sale.

In 1885, three years after starting operations in Canada, the Salvation Army established a corps in Aurora and purchased number 16 Mosley Street.

As was the case elsewhere, the Salvation Army received much abuse locally in its early days. The uniforms, the military terminology, the band playing in the streets: perhaps none of this seemed right for a religious organization. Boys and youths gathered outside the Mosley Street barracks week after week, jeering at the Salvationists. The local paper rebuked the boys for their rowdyism.

While the paper was against the boys for their bad behaviour, the paper was not necessarily for the Salvation Army. The editor, in his own way, was just as derogatory. In 1888, for example, readers were told how the local Salvation Army band set off for a gathering in Toronto with their ?drums, tambourines, and all the gaudy paraphernalia in which they are wont to equip themselves for the war path.?

In time, of course, the Salvation Army came to be highly respected.

The local corps was disbanded in 1975 [the Salvation Army would return to Aurora in 2016 as Northridge Community Church] and the building moved into private hands. It was for a time a child care centre, and more recently a naturopathic clinic.

The most noticeable external changes to the building have been around the front entrance and the windows. The door was drastically altered during the Salvation Army's time. Some years later, the tall, slender, pointed windows lost their graceful, Y-shaped tracery. But this elegant building still merits a closer look, whether or not it was designed by the great John G. Howard.