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What's in store for Toronto lakefront elevator?

Built for \$700,000 in 1928 by Canada Malting Co., a 107-ft.-high concrete elevator is a controversial artifact on Bathurst Quay along Toronto's lakefront. Like other concrete giants in cities like Minneapolis and Buffalo, this remnant of the Port of Toronto's 20th-C grain trade is at the center of a historic preservation dispute. It was designed by the firm of John S. Metcalf Co. Ltd., according to original plans. Until its abandonment last November, it produced 124 tons of malt daily. Now, depending on which side you're on, it's either a horrendously ugly obstacle to a waterfront view, or it's a piece of modern architecture with IA significance. The Toronto city council is struggling with the issue.

Some council members simply want to demolish what they insist is an eyesore. "It's so ugly that it's a crime to have this building continue to stand," said one. But others point out that five years ago, when the nearby Maple Leaf Mills (formerly Toronto Elevators Ltd.) 52-bin, 2 million bushel, Monarch elevator (1928) was smashed, it took a full year, cost \$1 million, and bankrupted the Thunder Bay wrecking company.

Estimates are \$2 to 5 million to demolish Canada Malting, thanks in part to its 7-in.-thick walls. It might be cheaper and easier to save it. Preservation architects point to the 1932 Quaker Oats elevator in Akron, Ohio, which was successfully converted into the 196-room Quaker Square Hilton Hotel. The 1980 project was featured in the SIA-produced film *Working Places*, and in 1986 SIA members toured the Akron Hilton during the 15th Annual Conf.

Compounding the problem is that the elevator is within Harbourfront, a massive 100-acre waterfront development site managed by Harbourfront Corp., a non-profit federal Crown agency. The lost Monarch elevator stood near the center of Harbourfront, while Canada Malting rises at one end. It was expropriated in 1973 as future park land and leased back to Canada Malting. Once touted as the savior of a "derelict industrial waterfront," the corporation lately has been criticized for overbuilding, catering to the affluent with condos, and crowding an area once envisioned as public park land. How many other cities have ridden the same rollercoaster, watching their industrial heritage smashed in the name of jobs and growth, only to see the economic dream evaporate.

Since the elevator stands on federal land, only Ottawa can save it. Toronto's Historical Board urged the city to ask Ottawa to have the structure designated as a historic structure under the federal heritage buildings policy. The council voted no. Nevertheless, the Ontario Heritage Foundation has granted \$10,000 to a neighborhood committee to study the elevator's significance as a "historical basis for preservation." A survey taken last Nov. showed that two-thirds of Harbourfront residents want the IA landmark preserved, and some architects have viewed reuse as an exciting design challenge. The elevator issue now seems trapped in the larger controversy over the entire Harbourfront affair.

S.T.



Above: Threatened Canada Malting Co. elevator (1928) in Toronto. Greg Tjepkema photo for Harbourfront Magazine.

Below: Expensive \$1 million demolition in 1983 of nearby Maple Leaf Mills (formerly Toronto Elevators Ltd.) 1928 Monarch elevator. Stewart Thompson photo.

