

O'Connor House (formerly known as Maryvale Farm) – Toronto – 1933-2009

By Mary Fay

Mary Fay, the Founding Chair of O'Connor Irish Heritage House, recognized the potential of this beautiful place and imagined the possibilities – gathered up people who shared the vision – and got to work at it. In recognition of her work on O'Connor House, the Celtic community of Toronto, namely the Beach Celtic Festival, presented her with the Celt of the Year Award on Saturday, September 12th. Mary's parents, the late Maurice and Gretta (née Wallace) Fay, hailed from near Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Ireland. The whole family arrived in Canada in 1976.

It is of particular interest to us to discover more of the rich history of O'Connor Estate/ Maryvale Farm as well as to increase our knowledge of the legacy of the life and times of its former owner, Senator Frank O'Connor. Please let us know: "has either of your parents or grandparents, or other relative, or your good self, worked for the Laura Secord company since 1913 to the present?" "Have you or any ancestor or relative attended the De La Salle College school from the 1940s or since?" "Likewise, the renamed school as it is now, Senator O'Connor College School?" "Do you remember working at Maryvale Farm on O'Connor Estate either during Frank O'Connor's time (1933-1939) or with the De La Salle Brothers before ownership moved over to the Toronto Catholic District School Board?" "Have you studied at the Institute of Medieval Studies or through the Celtic Studies program at St. Michael's College, U of Toronto?" "Are you a Senator O'Connor school Alumnus?" Tell us please, "What is your memory of Senator Frank O'Connor --- as a business man, employer, friend, philanthropist, neighbour, public servant, benefactor?"

Heritage Act). O'Connor House, pursuant to the terms of an agreement in principle with the TCDSB, will lease the Estate for \$1.00 per year for 21 years less a day with an option to renew for the same period. The lease obligates O'Connor House to restore the buildings for learning and cultural use. Kearns Mancini Architects Inc (*KMAI*) has an intimate knowledge of the property, having been the architects who designed the recently built Senator O'Connor College School and the firm has extensive experience in heritage restorations.

The O'Connor Estate buildings will undergo complete rehabilitation to be occupied and used for a broad range of learning and cultural activities. The project will preserve one of the few remaining heritage landmarks in the Don Mills community of Toronto – which stands on its original foundation. The project will increase investment in the community and in Toronto by creating jobs for restoration, construction, conservation and ongoing learning and cultural activities. Once restored, the Estate will be the focal point in an area that has become an increasingly multicultural community while honouring its Celtic roots. Studies undertaken by O'Connor House revealed strong interest in adult learning and cultural activities centred on the arts, personal development and greater knowledge of the history and heritage of the footprint of the once O'Connor Maryvale Farm Estate. It is envisioned that this project will increase the educational, cultural and heritage opportunities for youth. O'Connor House will add a venue of unique character to the community for learning and cultural events which promote multicultural awareness and acceptance complimenting the existing resources of Senator O'Connor College School. This creates an ideal situation where O'Connor House will expand existing alliances and partnerships with community organizations for the benefit of all.

O'Connor Irish Heritage House Inc. (*O'Connor House*) is a registered non-profit charitable corporation (BN 81563 3946 RR0001). Its mission is to restore and operate the Senator O'Connor Estate (*the Estate*) in Don Mills, Toronto, as a hub of learning and culture. The property, to be leased from the Toronto Catholic District School Board (*TCDSB*), is adjacent to Senator O'Connor College School, itself newly rebuilt in 2005. The O'Connor Estate was declared surplus in 2005 and slated for demolition. O'Connor House was formed on March 21st, 2005, with a vision to repair, restore and operate the O'Connor Estate as a learning and cultural centre which draws on the heritage of Senator O'Connor and the diversity of the surrounding community. The Estate, constructed in 1933, is a striking example of Colonial Revival architecture. The site exemplifies beauty and balance in both exterior design and interior functionality. The main house, coach house and outbuilding remain. They are in poor physical condition though the bones are good. Fundraising is on-going so that we may restore the buildings for learning and cultural use and to preserve the heritage of the house (*designated under the Ontario*



O'Connor House as it is today

For information on the treasures we have discovered in our five years work thus far, please go to our web site: www.oconnorhouse.ca. To contact our Chair: Dennis Timbrell or make any enquiries, please email to info@irishheritagehouse.com. Donations are gratefully accepted (*tax receiptable*) to "O'Connor Irish Heritage House/O'Connor House" 27 Crowland Drive, Toronto, ON M9W 2S5.

