

O'Connor Irish Heritage House

Who, what, why, where, when and how did such a project emerge?

A Brief History of O'Connor and the Estate

Senator Francis Patrick O'Connor built his family this Estate in 1933 in a Toronto quadrant bordered by Victoria Park, Lawrence, Pharmacy and Highway 401. At that time he named his Estate "Maryvale" after his daughter Mary. It's architectural style is Colonial Revival. The O'Connor family lived here until 1939 when the Senator died while in office, at the young age of 54 years. He had been a generous man in his community, a successful businessman, astute politician and a well known Catholic layman. He became Senator during MacKenzie King's term.

The Estate was bequeathed to the De La Salle Christian Brothers, who, with the help of the Daughters of Wisdom, built a school dedicated to Senator O'Connor. The Brothers remained here until they handed the school and Estate over to the Toronto Catholic District School Board.

The TCDSB planned to build a new school for the Senator O'Connor community. Now the construction of the new school is complete. The time has come to demolish the old school, portables and - wait - the O'Connor Estate? No! The O'Connor school community succeeded in getting a stay and they formed the "Save the O'Connor House" committee with a mandate to Share the Vision of preserving and putting the Estate to good use.

The Present

Early in 2005, a conversation about the need for a venue to showcase and share Irish culture and heritage and learning led to the idea of procuring the O'Connor Estate as a suitable site for this endeavour. Further conversations, phone calls, emails and letters spread the idea to the Irish community. Then followed invitations to tour the O'Connor Estate on three different dates in February 2005.



Now followed the need for discussion, dialogue, sharing of ideas and the need to ask the School Board to accept the Toronto Irish as the visionaries they were seeking. A series of Town Hall meetings were arranged during March and April, 2005. The Toronto Irish Radio Show hosts graciously promoted these meetings on their weekend shows - as did various Archdiocese parish bulletins and more word of mouth. Many people came and many people have already given their enthusiasm and support to the project.

A Committee was formed. A Mission Statement was developed. A proposal was created.

A presentation was made to the Toronto Catholic District School Board on May 12th 2005. The TCDSB agreed to allow the Toronto Irish Community to use O'Connor Estate as a centre of Irish Culture, Heritage and Learning. The possibilities to share the treasures of our past and to create a legacy for future generations are endless. We are passionate and we are alive with the Irish spirit of sharing, warmth and hospitality. We are ready to teach and pass on our dance, music, cuisine, arts, instruments, language, sport and more - all in this beautiful Estate. An Estate with beauty and balance in both the exterior and the inner workings of the buildings.

The Future

The new Senator O'Connor College School is set to open its doors in September. They are happy the Estate remains standing so they continue to be reminded of the past with fondness. We plan to take occupancy and begin our activities in O'Connor Estate early in the Fall also. Although the repair and restoration will take some months to be fully complete this is the time to become part of this exciting adventure. Come on board and help out. You can also lend your help in volunteering your time to this very worthwhile project.

Committee

Our committee is a group of enthusiastic, creative people who share a common vision. We are comprised of Irish immigrants, Irish Canadians together with an International flair through our marriages into the Irish race. As a place of Irish culture, heritage and learning we will increase the awareness among all Torontonians of the role of Irish immigrants to this City - particularly in education; and the growth and development of the city.

We invite you to visit our Website.

www.irishheritagehouse.com.

Contact us through the website or call: 416-745-2906 or mail to maryfay@allstream.net The atmosphere of being at home will enthrall any visitor. All are welcome.