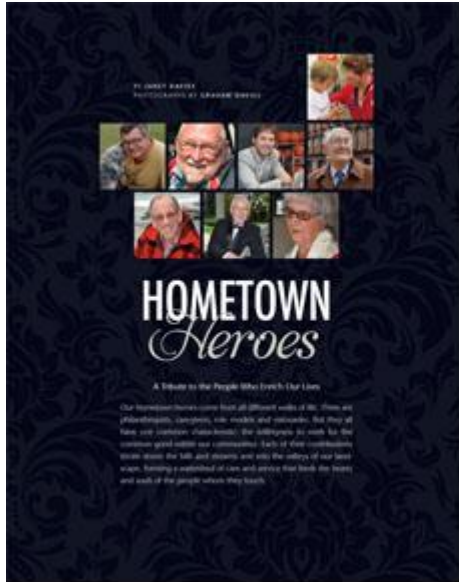


WATERSHED

LIFE IN NORTHUMBERLAND, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY AND QUINTE



Hometown Heroes

A Tribute To The People In Our Communities Who Enrich Our Lives

By Janet Davies

Peter J. Stokes
Restoration Architect

Niagara-on-the-Lake had six cheese shops and a shoemaker when I first went there. What's it got now? Tourist shops." Within seconds of sitting down with Peter John Stokes at his old kitchen table, I knew we were in for an interesting ride.

At 86, Mr. Stokes has a take-no-prisoners approach when talking about his passions and his work. With his elegant appearance, total recall and insistence on treating us to the best carrot cake in town, this was an interview to remember. Or not. Sadly I can only write so fast, and his stories and technical details came so fast I couldn't catch them all. So I have just my impressions and speedy scribbled notes to tell you about this remarkable man. Thank God for Google.

Peter Stokes deservedly received the first Eric Arthur Lifetime Achievement Award for his work in preserving heritage buildings, his publications and his volunteer work. Eric Arthur was his teacher at the U. of T., founded the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario in 1933 and led the charge to save Toronto's St. Lawrence Hall, Gooderham flat iron building and others. Peter Stokes continues the charge. He began his career in 1958 as the Restoration Architect for Upper Canada Village. He led the restoration of The Grange, the beautiful manor house at the Art Gallery of Ontario. His preservation and restoration projects are legion, including the Apothecary in Niagara-on-the-Lake; Victoria Hall in Cobourg and the St. Lawrence Hotel in Port Hope. He co-authored the Settler's Dream. He was the first full-time restoration architect in Ontario, his career coinciding with the pioneering era of Canadian architectural conservation. When the crucial Ontario Heritage Act passed in 1975, Peter Stokes was the go-to guy, at a time when few people truly understood the value of preservation.

After 40 years in Niagara-on-the-Lake, he moved to Port Hope because "I wanted to be back on a railway line again." He became fast friends with Peter Schultz, editor and publisher of the now defunct Port Hope Evening Guide." Together they explored and restored local historic properties. Stokes once bought a building on Walton Street to stop a Kentucky Friend Chicken franchise moving in; Schultz made a similar investment to prevent long-term tenants being evicted. There's a lot of heart there.

With 12,500 people, Port Hope has 160 buildings with historic designation, thanks largely to the late Alice King Sculthorpe, a heritage champion who pops up frequently in his stories.

Peter Stokes will work until he drops, which, judging by our brisk walk up Walton Street to his favourite café, won't be any time soon. He just published *Moisture the Menace*, a handbook for preserving and rescuing old steeples, spires, attics and cellars. His co-author, Thomas J. Plue, did the actual steeple climbing and is as incensed by neglect and shoddy repairs as Stokes – and just as outspoken to the owners.

Before we parted, with a quick hug and his assurance that he hadn't found us tedious at all, I asked him why old buildings are less valued here than in Europe. "Europeans are not so intimidated by them," he replied. "They're used to old buildings and appreciate their worth. They don't see them as worn out or a nuisance. Good North American buildings are just as viable. A colleague once said "If you build something that survives just one Canadian winter unscathed, you've got yourself a good building."