

The Victorian Tradition

General Information: Published after 2000

The Victorian Tradition

The Victorian era was one of inspired inventions and rapid change. Many figures from this period of London's past became nationally known by building the largest brewery in the country, by refining crude from the world's first oil wells in nearby Lambton County and giving birth to Imperial Oil in 1880, and by making London, Canada's second largest cigar making centre. Fortunes were made in these years before the war by retail merchants, large scale manufacturers, and wholesalers who imported vast quantities of hardware, dry goods, and staple foods, then repacked and sold them first across the region, and then, the country.

For most of this period, the city witnessed continuous growth. Immigrants from overseas as well as men and women from the farm streamed into the city raising the populations from 10,000 in 1855 to 40,000 in 1900 and then to almost 60,000 by WWI. Most entered the factories then turning out products that would become household names across Canada by the turn of the century: Leonard boilers, McCormick and Perrin soda crackers, McClary stoves, Emco pipes and beer from the Labatt and Carling breweries. Great financial institutions grew from the profits of these early industries. London Life, Northern Life, Canada Trust and Ontario Loan and Debenture survived as independents long into the 20th century. They were a source of capital for the many farmers and workers intent on owning their own home.

Today many of the era's great homes, imposing factories, wholesale houses, and commercial blocks survive, recalling a period of great wealth, elegant design and genuine craftsmanship.

London Regional Children's Museum

21 Warncliffe Road South

519-434-5726

www.londonchildrensmuseum.ca

The London Regional Children's Museum is a hands-on museum that encourages children from infancy to 12 years old and their grown-ups to play and learn together in an environment that brings heritage, science and the arts together. Learn about London's Victorian past in the Sifton Street Where You Live and the Child Long Ago Galleries.

Fanshawe Pioneer Village

2609 Fanshawe Park Road E.

519-457-1296

www.fanshawepioneervillage.ca

The Village's annual harvest festival reflects the great importance of agriculture to the growth of London during the Victorian era. Wheat was king, but pedigreed livestock, cheese and milk were staples of late 19th farm production that found markets as far away as England. The Village has

several homes, a church and schoolhouse, which showcase the era's prosperity. The interior of the Peel House has many examples of mid to late Victorian furnishings and decorative arts which one would expect to find in an upper middle class home of the time. Peel House also reflects developing domestic technology of the era and boasts a magnificent Victorian garden.

Eldon House

481 Ridout Street North

519-661-0333

www.londonmuseum.ca

In the 1870s, one of John and Amelia Harris's sons, Edward, and his wife took over Eldon House. Edward added a large wing to the house in 1878 containing a drawing room, additional living quarters for the servants, and a new kitchen. In the early 1890s, the house passed to his brother George along with his wife Lucy and their three children. A large inheritance received by Lucy allowed them to furnish and decorate the house and restore the extensive grounds which ran to the edge of the river. Many of the decorative items found today in the house are from a world tour the family took in 1897. Others, including many fine oil paintings and pieces of furniture, are from the English branch of Lucy's family.

Museum London

421 Ridout Street North

519-661-0333

www.londonmuseum.ca

Made in London, Lawson Family Gallery

The 19th century was an unprecedented period of invention and production all over North America. London entrepreneurs brought many innovations into production such as reapers, binders, threshing machines and steam engines, all used by the large agricultural community that surrounded London. Others built refineries for the production of kerosene culminating in the founding of Imperial Oil here in 1880. One man, Adam Beck, later the founder of Ontario Hydro, brought his wooden box company to London to supply the city's growing cigar industry.

A large number of products from London's 19th century factories are featured in the made in London section of Museum London's Forest City exhibition. Among them are crocks from the Glass Brothers potter, McClary stoves, Beck's cigar boxes as well as several key inventions of the 19th century including sound recordings, kerosene lamps, and the telephone.

Woodfield Walking Tour

In the late 1800s, as the fortunes of London's prominent merchants, bankers and manufacturers grew, mansions began to appear around Victoria Park and on many of the streets just east of the park, an area which soon became the city's most fashionable district.

Known today as the Woodfield Heritage District, it is now home to the city's greatest concentration of Victorian mansions. Many have been restored to their original condition recalling an era of stable hands, maids, cooks and gardeners.

Follow a self-guided tour along tree-lined avenues where houses of every major architectural style of the Victoria era can be found. Most were designed by local London architects including John M. Moore and George F. Durand, both of whom also lived in the district.

At least half of the city's major cigar manufacturers lived in Woodfield, as did the owners of London's largest department store Smallman and Ingram, brewers John Carling and John Labatt and several founders of Imperial Oil. One of the largest houses, Oakwood, was built by the son of the Anglican bishop who later absconded with his investment company's funds.

Several of London's finest churches can also be found in Woodfield, including the Romanesque Metropolitan United, and two of the City's great Gothic churches: Bishop Cronyn Memorial Anglican and First St. Andrew's United.

Downtown Discovery Tour

Much of downtown London dates from the late 19th century when it was the centre of the city's manufacturing and wholesaling activity, as well as its commercial core. Many of the surviving buildings attest to the fact that this was an era when successful entrepreneurs lavished attention on their buildings.

Recent restoration work has brought back many of these buildings to near original condition. The tour begins in the beautifully restored 1929 Bank of Toronto Chambers, now the Allyn Taylor Building, and takes visitors past some of London's finest downtown commercial buildings including the Smallman and Ingram department store, built in 1905. Two of London's finest Art Deco buildings, the former Canada Trust head office, from 1931, and the Dominion Building, completed in 1936, will also be seen, as well as London Life's head office, a magnificent Neo-Classical building set on the southern fringe of Victoria Park.

In 1865 Thomas Frazer Kingsmill, an Irish immigrant, opened a dry goods store on the main street of London, Ontario, Canada. The present building, the third to house the store on this site, features original tin-plated ceilings and hardwood floors. Other unique features of the building include a pneumatic tube system used to send paperwork and change throughout the store, and an old style elevator complete with an operator.

Other highlights include a row of Georgian buildings, which date from the time of London's founding, and St. Paul's and St. Peter's Cathedrals. Many of London's old downtown hotels hold

many interesting stories including the York, once the home of the Nihilist Spasm Band and the Hawthorn, where the notorious murderer Dr. Neil Cream may once have practiced, who was later hanged in England and was once thought to have been Jack the Ripper.

Famous People

Sir John Carling

Member of Parliament and Minister of Agriculture, who owned, with his brother, the Carling Brewing and Malting Company.

Sir George Gibbons

Negotiated the Boundary Waters Treaty, which created today's International Joint Commission.

Paul Peel

The childhood home of Paul Peel (1860-1892), one of Canada's most famous 19th century artists can be seen at Fanshawe Pioneer Village. Examples of Peel's work are frequently exhibited at Museum London.

Sir Adam Beck

Former mayor and MPP, the founder of Ontario Hydro, a prize-winning horseman and cigar box manufacturer.

Famous Places

The Ivey Family London Room – London Central Public Library

251 Dundas Street

519-661-2410

www.londonpubliclibrary.ca

The London Free Press index contains biographical information on many prominent Londoners of the Victorian era.

Famous Collections

The University of Western Ontario Archives & Research Collections Centre

519-661-2111 ext. 81111

In order for items to be retrieved prior to your visit, please call ahead. Houses the drawings of London's great Victorian architect George Durand and his firm.