

Marg Rowell



There is a house on William Street in Waterloo that has seen more love in its day than many people. It was built 121 years ago in the plain Victorian style and in 1966 it had the good fortune of being bought by Marg and Bob Rowell.

It wasn't long before the young couple fell in love with their historic home. It was the kind of devotion that allowed them to see beauty where others saw deterioration. When the wooden windows began to show their age, the Rowells opted to restore them rather than replace them. Bob Rowell felt the front of a house is like a face and "replacing the windows makes it look like a person with his eyes gouged out."

Inspired by their love for the home, the Rowells began to look around at other buildings in Waterloo that needed to be preserved. So it is fitting that the first meeting of the North Waterloo branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario took place in their living room on William Street in 1980.

Under the leadership of Marg Rowell the group began to educate residents about the value of their heritage homes and buildings. Rowell organized events such as lectures and house tours to garner support. "One of the biggest goals has been to convince people they should look after and maintain their buildings," Bob Rowell said once. "You don't really own a building, you're stewards of it. It's your job to keep that building intact."

As founding member and chair of the Waterloo Municipal Heritage Committee (then known as LACAC), Marg Rowell has led the movement to have thirty-six heritage properties formally designated. Most recently, Rowell, who has been described as dedicated and diplomatic, oversaw the establishment of Waterloo's first Heritage Conservation District. The new MacGregor/Albert Heritage Conservation District was established after hours of research, meetings and presentations. There are six other neighbourhoods in Waterloo Region that have been designated as heritage districts.

Rowell is also known in the wider community for her writing about the importance of enhancing and preserving Waterloo Region's history. She has authored many newspaper articles on the subject, and to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Waterloo in 1982, she co-wrote a book called *Welcome to Waterloo: An Illustrated History of Waterloo, Ontario*.

Some of her most recent accomplishments involve the preservation of the Elam Martin farmstead at RIM Park and the former Rummelhardt School that still stands on the property owned by the K-W Bilingual School. In the case of the Rummelhardt School, which was built in 1867, Rowell's leadership and attention helped to keep the historic school from being demolished.

She has devoted countless volunteer hours to the preservation of Waterloo's history and in 2006 she was awarded the prestigious Waterloo Award for her dedication to the community. During the award presentation it was said, "Marg Rowell's outstanding contributions to heritage preservation in Waterloo and in the Region have enhanced the quality of life in our community, and have inspired others to take up the cause of heritage conservation and promotion."

While the Rowells have recently sold their beloved William Street home and moved to Baden, Marg Rowell is grateful for the years spent in Waterloo and her involvement in its history. "I've met wonderful people," she said once. "I've learned an awful lot too and really enjoyed it. I would have never not wanted to do it."

Photo courtesy of Dr. Herbert Whitney.