

## ALISON, Alice Anne Ayer (1922 – 1991)

**A**lice Anne Ayer Alison was a Toronto architect widely recognized for her leadership in the successful campaign to save Toronto's Old City Hall in the nineteen-sixties. As a result of this experience and subsequent training, she became an expert in architectural preservation and restoration, and a leader in architectural conservancy in Ontario.

Alice Ayer was born in Toronto on June 15, 1922. She studied architecture at the University of Toronto, receiving a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1945. In the next two years, she worked for several Toronto firms:

Page & Steele, Architects, in 1945-46; Mathers & Haldenby, Architects, in 1946-47, acting as the "job captain" for the Woodgreen Community Centre, Queen Street East, Toronto; and Gordon S. Adamson, Architects, in 1947. She became a member of the Ontario Association of Architects and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1946.

She married Gordon A. Alison in 1947, and moved with him in 1951 to Geneva, Switzerland, where she studied French at the University of Geneva, and in 1952 to Montreal, where she worked in 1961-62 for Paul H. Lapointe, Architect, notably on the Blue Bonnets Raceway Club House, Montreal, and the Seamen's Hotel, Welland, Ontario.

In 1963, Mrs. Alison moved back to Toronto with her husband and their two daughters. She worked with Sproatt & Rolph, Architects, in 1964-65, on the Julia Greenshields Memorial Home, St. Clair Avenue West, Toronto. She also became fully involved in the campaign to save the old Toronto City Hall, designed by architect Edward Lennox, becoming the co-chairperson, with architectural historian James Acland, of the Friends of the Old City Hall, organized in 1965 to oppose the destruction of the 1899 building. The new City Hall had just been completed, and Eaton's had offered the city \$260 million for the land occupied by the old building, which it wanted for the development of the Eaton Centre.

Mrs. Alison was indefatigable in her efforts to save the Old City Hall. She was a tremendous force in making the people of Toronto aware of the historic and architectural value of the building, through lectures, slide presentations, radio and

television programs, articles and letters in the newspapers, and visits and phone calls to interested people. Although the City of Toronto and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto at first favoured the sale of the building to Eaton's, they eventually decided against it, largely in response to the opposition organized by Mrs. Alison and her associates.

Once the Old City Hall was saved, Mrs. Alison helped in its restoration by photographing it and documenting its original construction. The building was subsequently renovated to house provincial courts.

In the late nineteen-sixties, Mrs. Alison was active in research and documentation of nineteenth century housing patterns in Toronto and the Maritimes. She was the secretary of the Committee for Historic Preservation of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, producing, with architects Eric Arthur, Anthony Adamson and William Goulding, a travelling exhibition and booklet entitled "Historic Buildings of Canada". She was also a member of the Council of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, and a founding member, in 1968, of the Association for Preservation Technology, an organization operating in both Canada and the United States.

In 1970, Mrs. Alison moved with her family to Larchmount, New York. From 1971 to 1973, she studied restoration and preservation architecture at Columbia University in New York City, receiving the degree of Master of Science. As her thesis project for the degree, she undertook a definitive study of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, in Stamford, Ontario, built between 1825 and 1828, and thus one of Ontario's oldest Anglican churches. Her study included historical research, architectural investigation and measured drawings. In 1974-75, Mrs. Alison worked with Brown, Lawford & Forbes, Architects, on the restoration of several features in Central Park in New York City, including the Maine Monument and a cast iron bridge.

In 1975, Mrs. Alison returned to Toronto for one year, where she again became active in efforts to preserve the architectural heritage of Ontario. Most notably, she was instrumental in the establishment of the Old St. John's Stamford Heritage

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(Foundation) Association, an organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of this historic church. This effort was ultimately successful: the restoration of the building was completed in 1986, with the financial assistance of the Ontario Heritage Foundation.

In 1978, Mrs. Alison and her husband moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked for two years for William Martin O'Neill, Architect, Silver Springs, Maryland, acting as office manager, designer and project architect. In 1980, they moved to Rohrerstown, Maryland, where she worked on various design projects. In 1986, Mrs. Alison and

her husband returned to Ontario, where she designed and supervised the construction of the house in Caledon where they planned to retire. Although in failing health, she continued to work to complete her "dream home" until her death on February 12, 1991.

Alice Alison will be remembered by the architectural profession for her enormous contribution to the preservation and restoration of heritage buildings in Ontario. Her family and many friends will remember also that this contribution was an expression of a very caring person, who was fully involved with others, and with her community.