

BLACKWELL, William (1850 – 1937)

William Blackwell was a well known Peterborough architect who practiced in the area for over 50 years. He served on the original Council of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1890. When he died in 1937, he was the Association's oldest member.

Mr. Blackwell was born in Lakefield, Ontario on July 24, 1850 and obtained his early schooling in Peterborough. He began the study of architecture by serving as an apprentice for Walter R. Strickland of Toronto from 1872 to 1875. He then continued to develop professionally by working in Winnipeg and New York City from 1875 to 1879. He began a practice under his own name in Peterborough in 1880 and formed a partnership with his son, Walter R.L. Blackwell in 1919.

He undertook a variety of commissions over his long career. One of his first designs was the Sunday school for St. Luke's Church, Ashburnham, (now Peterborough), (1885). Other church commissions include Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon, Ont. (1900-01) and St. Paul's Presbyterian Mission Church, Wolfe at Reid Streets, Peterborough (1903). He designed many residences including a mansion for John C. Sullivan, Robinson Street, Peterborough (1886), and a residence for himself on Benson Street, Peterborough (1887).

He designed two hotels, one for the Chamberlen Estate, Water Street at Charlotte (1887) and the other for Thomas Darcy at Burleigh Falls, Ontario (1905); also Nicholls Hospital, Argyle Street (1888) and the Isolation Hospital (1910), both in Peterborough. His Peterborough schools included a four-room school house in 1893, the South Central school (1901) and King Edward school, Aylmer Street, (1906).

He was most noted for his public commissions which include the Town Hall and Market building on Elizabeth Street, Ashburnham (now Peterborough) (1889); Young Men's Christian Association building, George Street at Murray Street (1895-96); Young Women's Christian Association building, Alymer Street at Simcoe Street (1904-05) and the Fire hall on Alymer Street (1906), Peterborough.

The Academy of Music, Kent Street at Lindsay Street, Peterborough, designed by Blackwell in 1892, survives today as the Academy Theatre, retaining its original elegance, excellent acoustics, fine sight lines and adaptable stage configuration. The handsome upper two storeys of the Romanesque facade are preserved, retaining their fine bartizans which frame the wall and central pediment.