

## THE PROCEEDINGS PART III



Brant County Museum

Figure 1. Brantford Town Hall, 1849-50.

### JOHN TURNER AND ENGLISH ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCE IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

by Paul Dilse



## Introduction

John Turner's impact on the architecture of Brantford, Ontario and surrounding towns in the nineteenth century was great. He arrived from England when Brantford was, as his obituary states, "a scattered village" and lived to see it become a leading industrial city.<sup>1</sup> Turner's forty-year career in Canada, made possible by the opportunity for Englishmen to find employment in a British colony, was encouraged by economic growth in the region where he settled. His ability to meet the diverse needs of his clients and to master the rapid succession of nineteenth century styles ensured his success. While his early work shows the influence of his English training and sensibility, Turner's later work is a product of his clients' various tastes, his own Victorian interest in multiple styles and American influence.

## Early Influences

John Turner was born in Wales in 1807. He may have been raised in an area along the Welsh-English border if he indeed belonged to the Whitchurch, Shropshire family of architects listed in Colvin's *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600 - 1840*.

His obituary credits his training to the Cubitt brothers of London. He was probably working for the firm in 1827 when he married his first wife in London parish.<sup>2</sup> The Cubitts, who are considered to be the greatest urban developers of their time, principally designed and built housing, of which the Georgian terraces of Belgravia in southwestern London are most notable.<sup>3</sup> They were proficient in classically-derived styles of the period in England—the Georgian, Palladian, Neoclassical and Italianate.

## His Work

Turner, with his wife and family, had settled in Brantford by 1839 when he purchased a town lot there on Nelson Street.<sup>4</sup> He therefore arrived during the same decade in which the Brantford town plan was surveyed.<sup>5</sup> No record of his work during this stage of Brantford's development has been found.

Four public buildings, designed by Turner early in his documented career, owe much to his training by the Cubitts and to all the Palladian civic buildings to which he would have been accustomed. The Brantford and Caledonia town halls and the Brant County and Elgin County courthouses are styled in the British classical tradition of the eighteenth-century Palladianism.

The Brantford Town Hall, Turner's earliest known design, was erected in 1849-50 when newly-incorporated Brantford contained a population of about 3,200.<sup>6</sup> Turner received the contract during his first year of office as town councillor.<sup>7</sup> The building, (demolished in 1965), shows Palladian styling in its central pavilion with pediment and Tuscan pilasters. The raised entrance, giving the emphasis to the second floor, is also typical of the style (Fig. 1).

The Brant County Courthouse of 1852-3 (Fig. 2) in Brantford and the identical Elgin County Courthouse of 1852-4 in St. Thomas demonstrate the same Palladian sense of ordering if not always Palladian detailing, especially in the Baroque-inspired pediment and the crowning cupola.<sup>8</sup> It is apparent that Turner transferred the town hall's clock tower and its Tuscan order to the courthouses. The Cubitts' influence on Turner can best be seen by comparing his design for the courthouses to the Cubitts' London Institution of 1815-9.<sup>9</sup> While the form of the courthouses is more Palladian than that of the London Institution, the courthouses, central projecting bays, moulded round-arched windows, his treatment of the first floor and decorated string course between the first and second storeys bear a resemblance to the London Institution. Consider too the similarities between the London Institution and the Brantford Town Hall.

The Caledonia Town Hall and Lock-up House, built in 1857 to Turner's 1856 plans, recalls the Brantford Town Hall in its pediment, cupola and paired Tuscan pilasters somewhat akin to Palladio's Villa Thiene.<sup>10</sup> The Caledonia Town Hall is also adorned with a modified Palladian window which draws attention to the second storey.

Turner's English background, Anglican connections, probable contact with England through books and trips and knowledge of William Thomas' churches in Toronto and London, Ontario could ac-



Figure 2. Original Brant County Courthouse, 1852-3.

count for this two Gothic Revival churches—the Wellington Street Wesleyan Methodist Church and Grace Anglican Church, both in Brantford.

The Wellington Street Church, built in 1854-6 (Fig. 3) of white brick, the local building material Turner used most often, was fenestrated by Second Period Gothic (Decorated Gothic) windows called for by the Gothic Revival style.<sup>11</sup> However, the facade also included rounded and truncated buttresses and repeating arch corbel tables trimming the roof line and porch pediment. Inside, too, the space was a less than perfect embodiment of Gothic Revival despite the use of Decorated Gothic furnishings; the nonconformist hall-type interior with tiered galleries on three sides was designed to accommodate Methodist worship requirements. Wellington Street Church, Turner's earliest known church, can be considered a seminal building for his later church architecture; the street-facing gable ornamented with a corbel table is repeated in other work.

Turner's second church (in which he and his family worshipped) is definitively Gothic Revival in style (Fig. 4). In addition to Decorated Gothic windows, Grace Anglican Church of 1856-9 has on a clerestory and aisles more to the liking of A.W.N. Pugin, the leading exponent of the Gothic Revival. Before its alteration in 1913, the facade resembled Houghton-in-the-Dale Chapel, one of the medieval English churches favoured by Pugin.<sup>12</sup>

Close to Grace Church stands First Baptist Church, (Fig. 5) begun in 1857 and consecrated in 1862.<sup>13</sup> While earlier Turner buildings employed cupolas and a Baroque pediment on Palladian compositions, and a Romanesque corbel table on a Gothic Revival church, First Baptist Church signals a distinct movement away from his training and from strict adherence to the classical and gothic Revival styles. Perhaps the Baptists, a nonconformist denomination, wanted

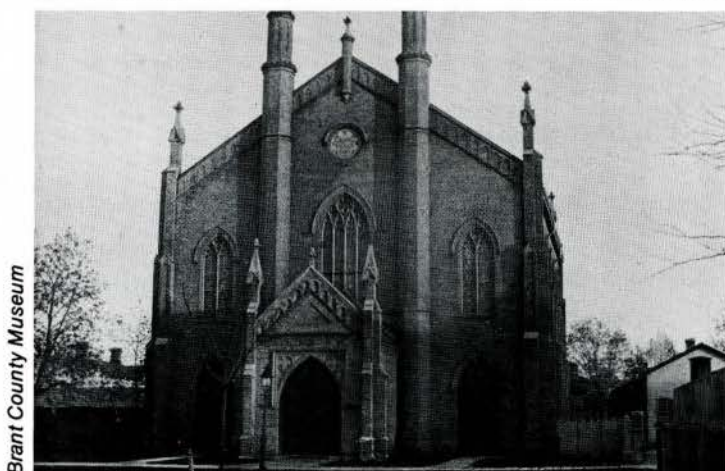


Figure 3. Wellington Street Church, 1854-6.





Figure 4. Grace Anglican Church, 1856-9.

a look distinguishable from the Anglicans next door, or perhaps Turner wished to attempt something different. The result, regardless of influence, is a building that retains a classical symmetry but which features the long, round-arched windows and truncated tower of the Italianate style (the vestibule is an addition). Here, one could refer to his earlier Wellington Street Church.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Mount Pleasant, another Italianate church, is even more similar to the Wellington Street Church arrangement. When it opened in 1863, *The Christian Guardian* described the style as Anglo Norman.<sup>14</sup>

The Pepper House of 1860, a hotel at Brantford's Market Square, is Turner's first example of his use of polychromy, another indication of a change toward later Victorian forms of expression.<sup>15</sup>

In 1861, Victoria Square in Brantford was laid out to a plan



Figure 5. First Baptist Church, begun in 1857 and consecrated in 1862.

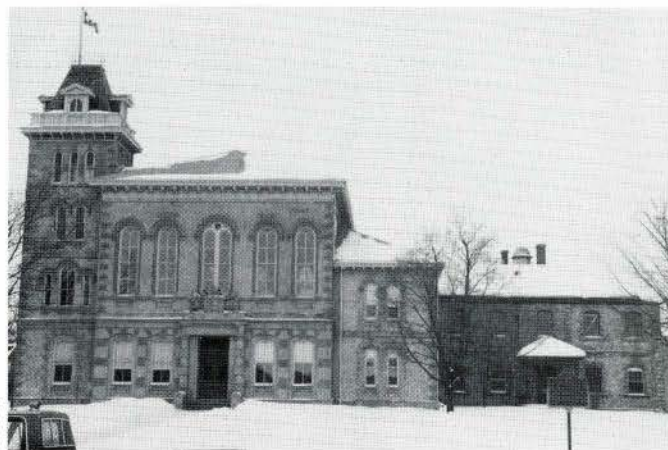


Figure 6. Norfolk County Courthouse, 1863-4.

prepared by the municipal Committee on Public Buildings and Squares of which John Turner was a member. A history published in 1883 credits John Turner specifically with the concept of the square. Space for a public square had been allotted in the 1830 town plan but council minutes reveal that it had "been allowed to lie waste up to this time." Motivated by patriotism or by Turner's wish to make a forecourt to the Brant County Courthouse, the square was traversed with gravelled walks forming what the history calls a "Union Jack" pattern. It was planted with trees and shrubs in what appears a random fashion, decorated with a central flagpole and enclosed with a wood and iron fence.<sup>16</sup>

The 1863-4 Norfolk County Courthouse in Simcoe (Fig. 6), Turner's winning entry in a competition that included W.T. Thomas and several others, mixed materials and styles.<sup>17</sup> Ashlar, vermiculated, tooled and carved stone and white brick walls, wood trim, slate roofs and iron cresting are combined. While most everything is Italianate in style—the long round-arched windows, the bracketed cornice and the asymmetrically-placed tower—the tower, however, is capped with a mansard roof, a characteristic of the Second Empire style. The tower's Palladian-like window recalls that found in the Caledonia Town Hall. A delight in itself, Turner's third courthouse is also noteworthy for its integration with the earlier jail (the lower, two storey section to the right of the photograph). There is a sequence of parts descending in scale, from the tower down to the jail.<sup>18</sup>

By the mid-1860s Brantford had become a prosperous manufacturing centre. The town of approximately 6,200 inhabitants boasted four extensive foundries.<sup>19</sup> Wynarden is a Turner-designed mansion built on industrial wealth (Fig. 7). Constructed in 1864-5 for Henry Yates, a railway magnate, Wynarden stands in isolated splendour on a hill overlooking Brantford's main rail line.<sup>20</sup> With this site in mind,

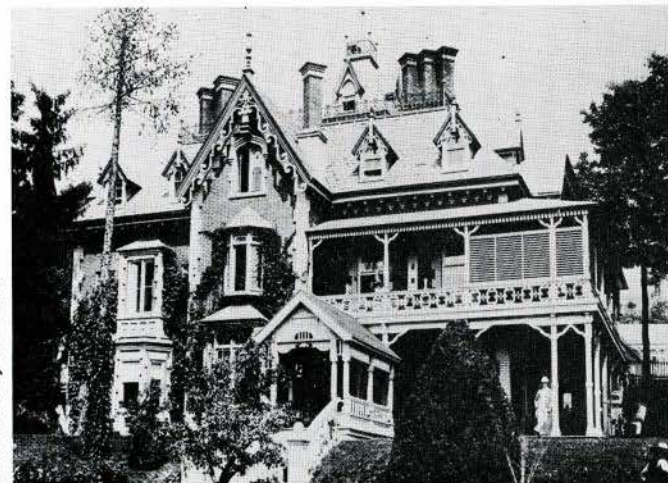


Figure 7. Wynarden Mansion, constructed in 1864-5 for Henry Yates.



Turner borrowed greatly from A. J. Downing's 1850 design of a "Lake or River Villa for a Picturesque Site."<sup>21</sup> Like Downing's villa, there are: bay and oriel windows, an elaborate wooden porch and veranda, a peaked middle bay trimmed with bargeboard, brackets, a slightly-curving main roof, dormer windows, and pyramidal-roofed towers. The diagonal chimneys drive from other Downing examples, the second storey family crests hidden from view in this illustration are copied from the work of another American Gothic proponent—A. J. Davis. A far cry from his early work, Wynarden shows American influence, picturesque tendencies, and growing eclecticism.

In contrast to Wynarden, Turner built for himself a humble cottage with classical symmetry and Gothic treatment. This 1866 cottage, presumably erected to his plans, was originally covered in roughcast plaster.<sup>22</sup> Of the many cottages that are found in Brantford, two others are known to have been designed by Turner. These are the Eliza Carey and Robert Morton Cottages, both built in 1870.<sup>23</sup>

In 1866 and 1867, Ker's Music Hall (later Joseph Stratford's Opera House) was erected to Turner's plans.<sup>24</sup> This eclectic building on Brantford's main street was decked out with a cast-iron storefront, Italianate windows and an exuberant, patterned-brick cornice and parapet.

He was busy on the main street again after an 1870 fire destroyed most of the flanking buildings. The George Foster and Mary Wallace commissions date from this year. The George Foster Buildings and one of Mary Wallace's buildings show his interest in the Second Empire style, first seen in the Norfolk courthouse tower. Turner also designed two large residences in Brantford in 1870—Dr. Henry Allen's Second Empire house (the porch is a modern attachment) and merchant Henry Brethour's Italianate house, spiced with Palladian references.<sup>25</sup>

Except for the St. George Wesleyan Methodist Church of 1869-70<sup>26</sup>, which was arranged like the Wellington Street Church, and for St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Stratford, (1867-8)<sup>27</sup>, which is arranged like First Baptist Church, Turner's later churches are more complex compositions. St. Basil's Roman Catholic Church in Brantford, (1866-83), is the earliest example of Turner's more ambitious elevations.<sup>28</sup> The familiar street-facing gable is sandwiched between two towers, one of which is taller. High Victorian Gothic churches composed like St. Basil's include the Paris Congregational Church of 1875-6, Brantford's Park Baptist Church of 1881-3 and Paris Baptist Church of 1885.<sup>29</sup> The other kind of more complex church composition, that characterises Turner's later years, involves the familiar street-facing gable and one side tower. Brantford's North Ward Wesleyan Methodist Church of 1870-1, Waterford Baptist Church of 1877-8 and Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Paris (1880-1), are High Victorian Gothic churches each having a side tower.<sup>30</sup> Brantford's Central Presbyterian Church of 1877 was similarly arranged but had rounded openings.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 8. Commercial Buildings of 1881-2.

The Commercial Buildings of 1881-2 represent Turner's finest commercial work.<sup>32</sup> The White brick, eclectic-Italianate block reminds us of the prosperity and confidence of the then recently-incorporated City of Brantford (Fig. 8). Note how the block pivots at its corner site.

Brantford's civic pride of the period was no better reflected than in the John H. Stratford Hospital, erected in 1884.<sup>33</sup> Turner's High Victorian Gothic composition combined wooden porches and balconies, flamboyant polychromatic brick walls, a patterned slate roof and soaring cupolas and chimneys.

Just as the Methodists, Roman Catholics and Baptists had turned again to Turner for their new buildings, the Brant County council commissioned him to prepare plans and elevations for additions to the courthouse in 1886-7.<sup>34</sup> Compare the classical 1852-3 building to its eclectic make over; two polychromatic brick towers, a patterned slate roof and decorative chimneys have been added for a High Victorian visual effect (Fig. 9).

Turner did not see the courthouse renovations completed. He died on January 21st, 1887 at his Nelson Street home, with his second wife, children and close friends in attendance. It is remarkable that Turner remained professionally active into his eightieth year.

## Assessment of His Work

John Turner's work exemplifies an ability to handle many building types and styles, a requirement of his time and the location of his practise. To limit his product to mere versatility would be to ignore the pleasant compositions he achieved. He also managed to mark some of his buildings with a signature—the corbel table on his churches and the Commercial Buildings.

Turner's Victorian architecture makes up a profound part of Brantford's heritage and provides a landmark in each of St. Thomas, Caledonia, Mount Pleasant, Simcoe, Stratford, Paris and Waterford. Surviving examples of his work deserve recognition and conservation.

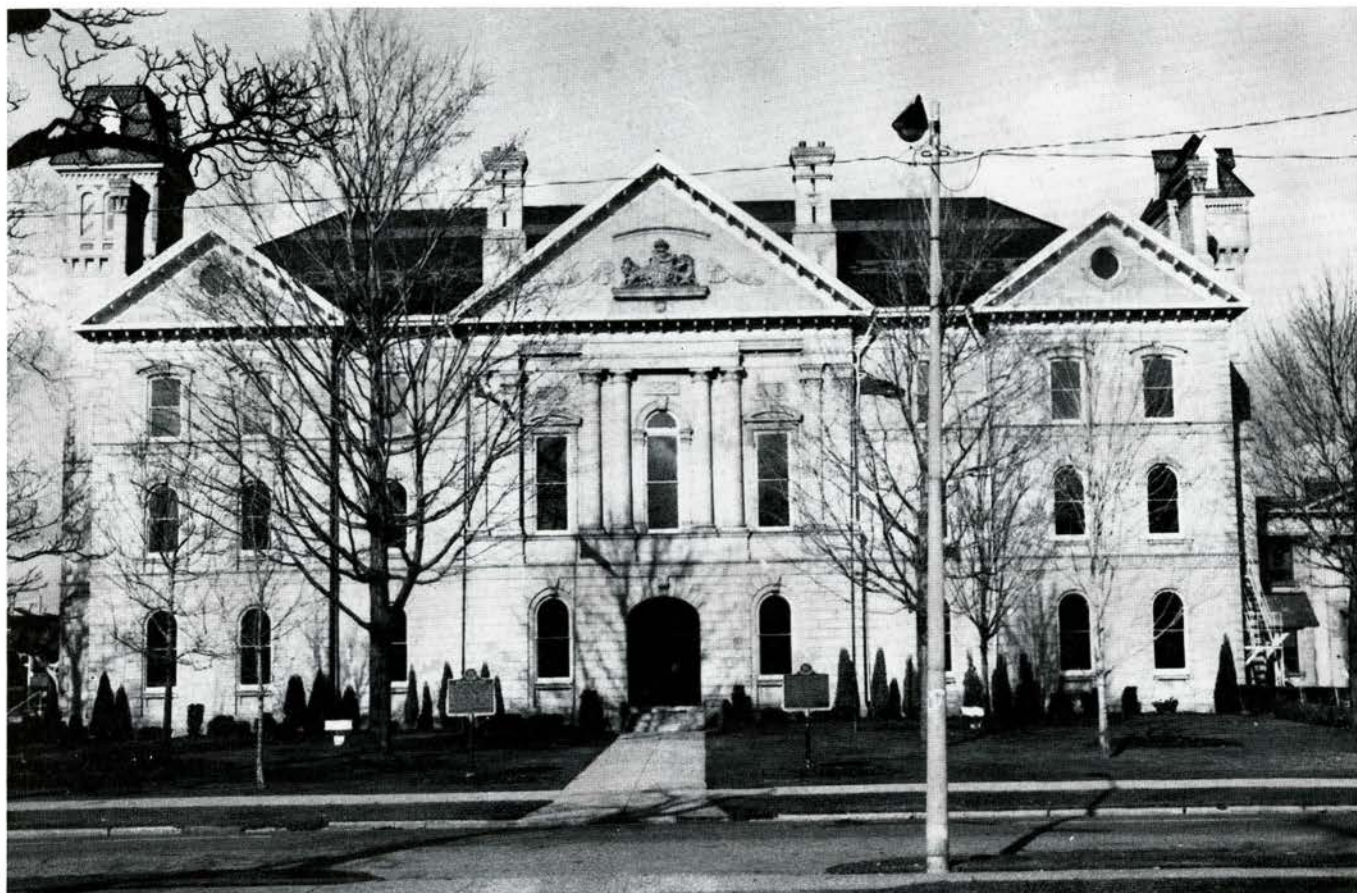
## Addendum

Since the preparation of this paper, three other Turner-designed buildings have been documented. These include the 1863-4 Council House of the Six Nations Indians, St. Paul's Anglican Church of 1866 and the 1874 Onondaga Town Hall.<sup>35</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. "The Death Roll. John Turner, Esq., J.P.," *The Daily Expositor* (Brantford), 22 January 1887.
2. Register of the marriage between John Turner and Elizabeth Marsh, 25 February 1827, St. Mary-le-bone Parish, Middlesex County, England, in the possession of Constance Pole Bayer Toronto.
3. H. Hobhouse, **Thomas Cubitt, Master Builder** (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. xix.
4. "City of Brantford Land Registry Abstract Book C," p. 73.
5. L. Burwell, "Brantford in the Gore District U. Canada," 13 August 1830, Map D-2, Archives of Ontario.
6. "Minute Book of the Council of the Town of Brantford" V. 1, 28 May 1849, Brantford City Hall; W. H. Smith, **Canada: Past, Present and Future** V. 1 (Toronto: Thomas Maclear, 1851), p. 238.
7. "Minute Book," *op. cit.* Turner was active in municipal politics for eight terms of office—1849, 1854-6, 1859-60, 1863-4. According to his obituary, he was also chief of the first fire company ever formed in Brantford and a justice of the peace.
8. **Minutes of the Provisional Municipal Council of the County of Brant** (Brantford: Racey & Mair, 1852), 1 May 1852, Brant County Courthouse; "Minutes of the Provisional Municipal Council of the County of Elgin," 3 June 1852, Elgin County Offices.
9. H. Hobhouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-7 and plate 2.
10. "Minutes of the Proceedings of the Municipal Council of the Village of Caledonia . . .," 18 March 1856, Archives of Ontario.
11. "Wellington Street Wesleyan Methodist Church, Brantford—Minutes of Trustee Board" V. 1, February 1853, United Church of Canada Central Archives; "Opening of the new Wesleyan Church," *The Christian Guardian*, 23 July 1856, p. 163.





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Figure 9. Brant County Courthouse after 1886.

12. "Opening of the New Episcopal Church," *The Brant Weekly Expositor*, 3 June 1859; "Minutes of Grace Anglican Church," 7 October 1913, Brantford; A.W.N. Pugin, *Examples of Gothic Architecture* V. 2 (London, 1839), plate 2.
13. T.S. Shenston, *Jubilee Review of the First Baptist Church, Brantford 1883-84* (Toronto: Bingham & Webber, 1890), p. 42, Brant County Museum.
14. "Church Opening and Tea-Meeting," *The Christian Guardian*, 9 September 1863, p. 146.
15. "Another New Hotel," *The Brant Expositor*, 4 January 1861.
16. "Minute Book of the Council of the Town of Brantford" V. 2, 24 January 1859, 24 November 1859, 5 December 1859, 18 February 1861 and 20 May 1861; *The History of the County of Brant, Ontario* (Toronto: Warner, Beers & Co., 1883), pp. 265-6.
17. "Local and District News," *The Norfolk Reformer* (Simcoe), 4 June 1863; "Opening of the New Court House," *The Norfolk Reformer*, 3 November 1864.
18. D. Ferguson et al., *Courthouse; The Norfolk County Court House, Simcoe, Ontario* (Simcoe: Norfolk Historical Society, 1975), p. 13.
19. A.R. and J.R. Sutherland, *County of Brant Gazetteer, and General Business Directory for 1865-6* (Ingersoll, C.W.: Sutherland, 1865), p. 79, Metropolitan Toronto Library; *Census of the Canadas, 1860-61 Personal Census* V. 1 (Quebec: Bureau of Agriculture and Statistics, 1863), p. 370.
20. "Mr. Yate's New Villa," *The Brantford Expositor*, 12 May 1865.
21. A.J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses . . .* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), p. 343.
22. "Town of Brantford Assessment Rolls," 1866, p. 12 and 1867, p. 17; *Special Semi-Centennial Edition of the Daily Expositor*, 1 July 1927, p. 69.
23. "Brantford's Record for 1869 and 1870," *Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 11 November 1870.
24. "Ker's Music Hall," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 1 March 1867; *The History of the County of Brant, Ontario* op. cit., p. 276.
25. "Brantford's Record for 1869 and 1870," op. cit.
26. "Foundation-Stone Laying, St. George," *The Christian Guardian*, 29 September 1869, p. 154.
27. J. Sutherland, Ed., *Counties of Perth and Waterloo Gazetteer and General Business Directory for 1870-71 . . .* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1869), pp. 111-3, Stratford-Perth Archives.
28. "Laying the Corner Stone," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 7 November 1866; "Brantford's Record for 1869 and 1870," op. cit.; "St. Basil's Church," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 10 December 1875; "Our City's Progress," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 15 December 1882.
29. "Minute Book, Congregational Church, Paris," V. 2, 20 January 1875, Untied Church Archives; "Park Baptist Church," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 8 June 1883; "Important Ceremony," *The Brant Review* (Paris, Ont.), 11 July 1885.
30. "Brantford's Record for 1869 and 1870," op. cit.; "Church Dedication in Waterford," *The Canadian Baptist*, 24 January 1878, p. 5; "Paris. Church Dedication," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 11 February 1881.
31. "To Builders and Contractors," *The Globe* (Toronto), 15 June 1877.
32. "City Improvements," *The Brantford Weekly Expositor*, 9 December 1881.
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34. *Minutes and Proceedings of the Municipal Corporation of the County of Brant . . .* (Brantford: Daily Courier, 1885, 1886), 4 June 1885, p. 22 and 25 March 1886, p. 23.
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