

HIGH TIME LONDON HAD A REAL CITY BUILDING

FEDERAL SQUARE OR ANOTHER SITE
FOR PROPOSED CITY HALL, PROBLEM
OVER WHICH DEBATE HAS LONG RAGED

Both Have Their Advocates
and Opponents and Interest
in Site Is Keen.

ACTION IS NEEDED

London M.P.P. Asserts Legisla-
tion Has Conditionally Bound
City to McCormick Site.

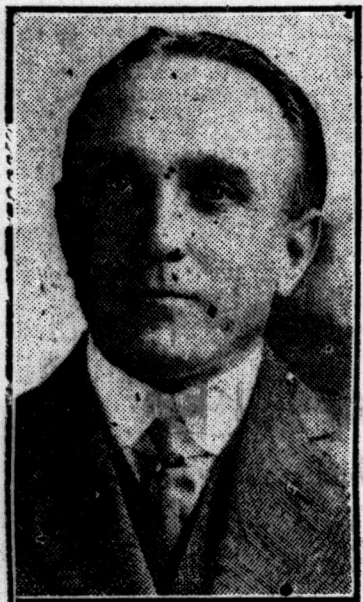
By WILLIAM SHARMAN.
Mayors may come and mayors may
go, but the city hall wrangle stays on
forever.

Or so it would seem to those who
have trudged stoically to the polls
upon several and sundry occasions
during the last decade to register
opinion upon an issue still claiming
attention, at infrequent intervals,
around the council board.

But George Wenige, chief magis-
trate for the current year, proposes,
with apparent sincerity, that 1923
shall witness the elimination of this
chestnut from the fertile fields of
municipal endeavor and prolonged
debate.

And six members of his council
announce, with ardent fervor and
growing insistence, their prepared-
ness to sink all personal ambitions, if
any exist in this particular instance,
and play "Follow My Leader."

"This is 1923," quoth the mayor,
and the wall calendars prove conclu-



ALD. ED. HAYDEN.

gely that he is correct, but 1923 finds
the celebrated city hall problem
bothering the electors of ward four
as they journey to the polls today—a
problem eclipsed only perhaps, and
then on account of its longevity, by
that famous civic bugaboo—what to
do about bylaw 916, the city's iron-
clad agreement with the street rail-
way corporation.

The city hall issue is still the
"burning question of the hour"—even
as it was when "Charlie" Graham
ruled from the mayor's chair in the
marble halls of municipal administra-
tion and Col. W. G. Coles rapped for
order when the members of the "new
city hall committee" assembled in
special caucus.

Events of vital importance and
rare significance have left their
smudge on history's pages. Thrones
have been carelessly upset in the
grand rush. Regal crowns have been
knocked off for the proverbial thirty
pieces of silver or less, when there
was need for great haste.

The underworld heads have rolled
into the baskets or else their owners
may be located laboring in distant
chop houses across yonder
border. Governments have appeared
overnight from nowhere in particular
and retired with equal celerity. The
fate of nations has been decided, not
once but frequently. The Ontario
temperance act has stood the test of
time. Premier Drury has gone back
to Crown Hill. All this has transpired
and more—but there is no new city
hall in London, although the people
wanted one in 1911.

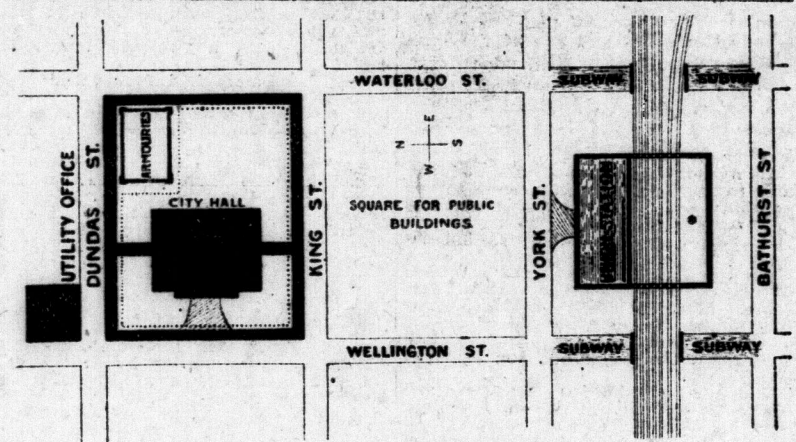
Many Votes Taken.
None can side-step the plain, un-
varnished declaration that the city



ALD. GORDON DRAKE.

councillors of by-gone years are
chiefly responsible for this. Some-
times victims of unavoidable cir-
cumstance, but more than often
agreeing to disagree, the legislators of
the past have handed down this city
hall football from father to son, and
after the strife and fury of many a
hot campaign, a desolate federal
square remains as the silent reminder
for those who buried miserably with
a mandate from the people.

But how long is this sort of thing



A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE.

This diagram shows the location of the proposed city hall if built on the Federal Square site. It also shows the new union depot location and the block on which other public buildings might be erected.

to last? Year after year, the people
of this city have watched, first with
interest and pride, then with impa-
tience, and lastly with frank dis-
taste, the city fathers argue and ponder
to no purpose about the relative
merits of sites and buildings.

Time and again, no person seems
to recollect, the precise number of oc-
casions they have voted on this propo-
sition and that. Do you want it
here? Do you want it there? Do you
want it this year or do you want it
at all. These and other questions
have been fired at the electors until
they are weary and "fed up" with
the entire subject, and the aldermen
thrown in for good measure.

But it is a long lane that has no
ash barrel," they have said, and 1923
was heralded as the time-honored
"dawn of a new era." "Let George do
it," they chorused, and George says
he will let them let him, and to date
six members of the council recite
that they want to be in at the finish—
if there is one.

Sir Henry Thornton, president of
the Canadian National Railways was
in the city a few days ago. The
mayor and other leading lights drove
him about the city. They singled out
the chief points of interest, including
the old Grand Trunk depot. That in
itself is a "historic pile"—a work of
art. All acknowledged it as such,
even their distinguished visitor.

Where is Your City Hall?

But Sir Henry wants to see every-
thing when he steps "out among
them." "Where is your city hall?"
he asked pleasantly as the civic party
encircled Victoria Park. "Over on
Dundas street," responded the mayor
and his associates, as they diverted
Sir Henry's attention to the beauties
of their immediate surroundings.

And it has come to this—the mayor
and the "city fathers" are actually
ashamed of their civic offices—and
they have need to be, in a growing
city of 65,000 people, and a rosy
future. What then do the ratepayers
think?

In order to appreciate better the
intricacies of the city hall muddle—
and it seems to be a muddle, even at
this late date—one must glance back
through the city hall minutes to the
year of our Lord 1912.

On Oct. 22, the McCormick Manu-
facturing Company, in a communica-
tion to Ald. W. G. Coles, chairman
of the city hall committee, offered
their property (now known from
Halifax to Vancouver as the federal
site) to the city for the sum of \$125,
000 in cash, provided they were given
a fixed assessment for the period of 15
years, and that the city will use "the

entire block for the purpose of a fed-
eral square; provided, however, that
the city will make all reasonable
local improvements, and the company
agrees to pay therefore according to
the provisions of the local improve-
ment act, and the company offers
also to erect a magnificent plant cost-
ing \$200,000, and employing 700 to
1,000 hands."

Federal Square.

In those days it was proposed that
London should have a "federal" and
not a municipal square. And Col.
Coles seems to have been the lead-
ing spirit. In any event, eleven
years have slipped past, and no per-
son has yet stepped out to dispute
his unofficial designation—"father of
the federal square movement."

Optimism was rampant at that
period. The federal government pre-
sented a friendly demeanor toward
the project, and through the medium
of the late Gen. Sir Sam Hughes it



ALD. FRANK MCKAY.

promised co-operation and financial
assistance to the tune of "not ex-
ceeding \$100,000." In a letter to Col. (then Capt.)
Coles on Nov. 15 of the same year,
the late Sir Sam voiced the sincere
hope that the city hall bylaw would
be indorsed "in order that the city
and the militia department" would

own the entire block" (bounded by
Dundas, Waterloo, Wellington and
King streets).

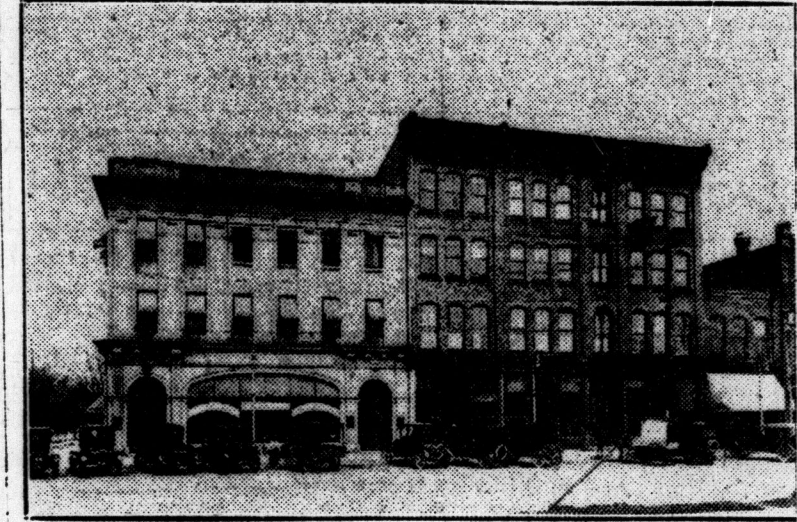
The council was evidently "sold"
with the idea. They passed the bylaw
in any event, authorizing an expendi-
ture of \$75,000, and the members of
the city hall committee and their as-
sociate supporters were busy drafting
plans and building halls—in the air,
as it has developed since.

Along about Jan. 30 of the following
year the first stumbling block was
encountered. Mayor Graham received
a communication from Gen. Hughes
explaining that it was "too late to
get their \$100,000 into this year's es-
timate, owing to various delays, and
it would be much better to wait and
place it in next year's estimate. The
militia department would be pleased
to grant the owners permission to
occupy the premises for another
twelve months."

Then, after an exhaustive inter-
change of communications back and
forth with the Ottawa authorities, it
was decided to defer inauguration of
the federal scheme, and an agreement
was signed with the McCormick Com-
pany which provided that the pre-
mises should be given up on or before
Sept. 1, 1914. But that corporation
was permanently established in the
annexed district of East London long
before that date. In the meantime,
in 1913, the sum of \$250,000 was voted
by the people.

War Intervenes.

Then the Great War intervened.
Other affairs claimed the close and
immediate attention of the late Sir
Sam and his advisers and colleagues
down Ottawa way. The federal

ALL LONDON HAS AS A CITY BUILDING.
This is the public utilities building and present city hall at Wellington and Dundas streets. Though serving its purpose, it lacks many features an up-to-date city hall should have and certainly is not an adequate structure for a city of London's size and importance.

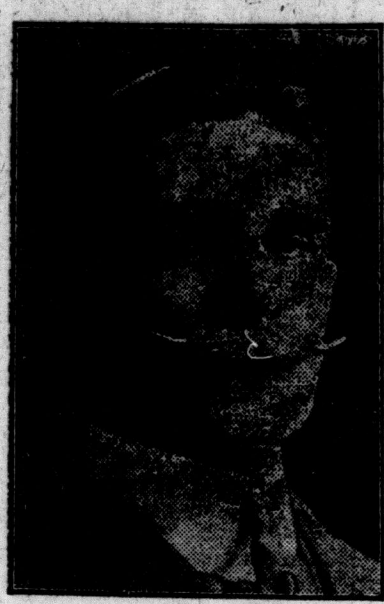
square proposal was allowed to lapse,
only to be revived from time to time
by succeeding mayors and councils,
who battled in turn as to the need or
otherwise of a city hall or a federal
square.

Records reveal the fact that while
the government was compelled to
shelve the scheme until the cessation
of hostilities, Col. Coles and his ad-
herents, both in and out of the city
council, had not thrown up the
sponge. They fully anticipated that
the authorities at the Dominion cap-
ital would remain true to their
pledges.

This is evidenced by a report in
The Advertiser of Dec. 29, 1916, from
W. W. Gammage, then a member of
the board of control (an organization
since departed to join ex-Mayor
Wilson's civic commission).

During a visit to Ottawa the con-
troller had met Hon. Robert Rogers,
then minister of public works, who
promised that the government would
surely advance its share of the
finances once peace had been de-
clared.

This is recorded as being "very
gratifying" to ex-Controller Coles,
who, while appreciating the need of

COL. W. G. COLES,
Practically the father of the Federal
Square movement.

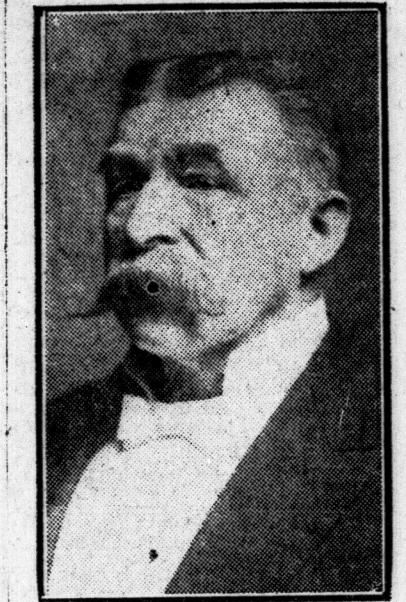
conservation of public moneys until
after the war, said: "I believe that
the city would regret the step if the
federal scheme is voted down."
Time slipped along, and a decision
was reached in Europe, and the boys,
including Col. Coles, came back from
"over yonder." The city hall tussle
was reopened anew in civic circles.

Coles, "and told the government that
no person wanted the federal square
project. The minister seemed quite
impressed with the idea, however, in
spite of this, but my impression was
that the deputation lacked pep."

In another report of the same con-
ference it is written that "Ald. Wilson
was very aggressive 'lobbying' with
the ministers against the scheme."
Ald. Gordon Drake was also a mem-
ber of the party, and his report was
very gloomy. "I don't think the gov-
ernment wants anything to do with
it," he said. "I think they want to
get out of it, and right through the
meeting Ald. Wilson kept remarking
that the people didn't want the hall
on the square at all."

Mr. Somerville's View.

C. R. Somerville, mayor at that
period of evolution, accompanied the
deputation, although he is credited
with the following statement as he
boarded the Ottawa train: "We are



ALD. PETER J. WATT.

through flirting with the federal gov-
ernment, and one thing is sure in
any event, I favor building the hall
right here on the Spencer side."

The upshot of the Ottawa negotia-
tions can be adduced from the fol-
lowing editorial extract of that day:
"The deputation which went from
this city to ask the government to
keep its promise is said to have been
composed largely of members who
were either apathetic in the matter
or else had other plans in mind of
which they approved."

And so the battle dragged along.



ALD. JOHN COLBERT.

the ratepayers voting spasmodically
not to build it on the Spencer side.
Councillors and others emerged with
increasing frequency to argue the
merits of other sites, and it is recol-



MAYOR GEO. A. WENIGE.

He favors the Federal Square, and
wants work on the new building
started this year.

ected that prospective locations were
considered, ranging from the county
site, King and Ridout streets, to the
"V" at the northwest entrance to
Victoria Park. Hope of government
participation had long since been
abandoned, it seemed.

In 1921 there was still further ac-
tivation for a new city hall on the
Spencer property, and Col. Coles and
others considered such drastic action
as injunction proceedings to halt
operations of this order if attempted.
Plans for the new building drafted
during this regime were all upset,
however, by the people, who rejected
by a majority of 2,000 the proposal to
build on the present location. No
person at the city hall can state
definitely just where these outlines
are now—if not destroyed.

Chinese Puzzle.

The people turned the trick again
at the last election, the only marked
difference being that the majority
against the Spencer block was
doubled. But if ex-Mayor Wilson and
his colleagues planned to leave
a veritable Chinese puzzle for the
1923 council to ferret out, they cer-
tainly succeeded.

"Build on the McCormick property,
where the people have said they want
it," pronounces Mayor Wenige.
"Build it on the McCormick prop-
erty," concurs Ald. George Burdick,
even as he argued when he was a
member of the council in 1914, and
as he urged from the public platform
before the last election.

"Build it on the McCormick site,
where the people have said they want
it," defines Ald. Drake, and he pro-
poses to move to that effect at the
next session of the finance committee,
reluctant to await the pleasure of
Mayor Wenige or anyone else for
that matter.

Ald. Peter J. Watt is also convinced
beyond further argument, that the
old McCormick tract is the logical
location, as well as the choice of the
people.

And both Labor members of the
council, Ald. John Colbert and Ald.
Frank McKay, see "eye to eye" with
the mayor's appeal for action.

But wait a minute—don't go too
fast. There are other counties to
hear from. In the first instance, we
have Ald. John T. May, Ridout street,
who wants the new city hall on the
county property, near the corner of
Ridout and King streets.

Ald. May kept interjecting this sug-
gestion during the 1922 council ses-
sions, despite the fact that he was
standing alone, and lured no one into
his camp. He is still alone, although
he retains a bulldog grip upon his
original proposition.

Alternative Site.

Then we turn to Ald. W. A. Wilson,
who does not appear to view the
McCormick site as the most suitable

choice for the new city hall, if it is
ever built. The former chairman of
the board of works has referred
several times to the corner of Queen's
avenue and Clarence street, (selected
by Thomas Adams, town planning
expert), arguing that the city could
purchase this property at a reason-
able figure and not a substantial
savings. He has been frank and
emphatic in his recent unfavorable
opinions relative to the McCormick
land, just as he was when he went
to Ottawa four years ago.

Ald. Douglass, the present chairman
of the board of works, advances with
a new train of thought. There is
some doubt in his mind, he explains,
whether the people want a new hall
on the latter site, and even if so, do
they want it this year? He believes
that while the people, by a 4,000 ma-
jority, eliminated the Spencer block
from the contest, it did not neces-
sarily follow that they wanted the hall
across the street.

As an alternative site he submits
the "V"—the northwest extremity of
Victoria Park—asserting that this
would be an admirable location for
many reasons.

Last February, with the usual dis-
cussion attending such events, a ma-
jority ruled council ruled that the
city hall proposal should rest quietly
for another year—as insufficient
funds were available.

But this did not mark the finish.
Ald. Colbert was next responsible
for a resurrection, questioning why
it was not possible to sell all portions
of the so-called Federal Square, ex-
clusive of the McCormick property.

DR. H. A. STEVENSON, M.P.P.,
Who asserts that the city is more or
less bound by law to use proceeds of
certain property sales for new city
hall on Federal Square site.

and by coupling the proceeds with
such debentures, long since voted for
that purpose, undertake the im-
mediate construction of civic office
buildings—not a castle.

Immediate Action.

Always alert to the possibilities of
the situation, the advocates of the
"immediate action" program seized
this opportunity to further their
cause. Long-distance debate ensued
and a compromise was made. Re-
quest was entered in the city of
London bill, then going to the On-
tario Legislature for permission to
sell all property, exclusive of the Mc-
Cormick site, without a vote to the
people.

Mayor Wenige and Ald. Judd jour-
neyed down to the capital to note it
the progress of this legislation in the
midst of the private bill committee.
Another hitch occurred when inquisi-
tive members of the latter section of
the Drury administration arose in
mass formation to question what was
the opinion of the masses in this
respect.

It will be remembered that the
mayor and the chairman of his fi-
nance committee came back to Lon-
don, uncertain whether the city of
London bill would ever see the light
of day again; that portion of it at
least pertaining to the council's
permanent donating issue.

Dr. H. A. Stevenson, the sitting
member for London, was quite
prominent when the topic claimed
the attention of his associates in the
Legislature, and from his attitude
throughout it was quite evident that
it was his desire that nothing should
transpire that would, in the slightest



ALD. GEORGE BURDICK.

manner, threaten the existence of the
McCormick site as the spot for the
next city hall.

When the Drury government, now
enacting that process commonly
recognized as "going to the country,"
the member returns to his constitu-
ency in a jubilant frame of mind. "I
have fixed it," he reports, "and is
such a manner that if they do not
choose to build the city hall on the
McCormick site they won't be able to
build it anywhere."

Dr. Stevenson's Action.

Dr. Stevenson was mayor in this
city upon more than one occasion, and
naturally he is more or less familiar
with the city hall problem.

"When I was mayor the people vot-
ed to put the hall on the corner of
Turn to Page 19, Column 5.

THE FEDERAL SQUARE CITY HALL SITE.

How much better this corner would
look if occupied by an imposing and
ornate structure housing London's

THE "Y" ALTERNATIVE CITY HALL SITE.

This triangular location on Rich-
mond, Central avenue and Park ave-
nue is the alternative site for Lon-
don's new city hall. This site is ob-
jected to by some on the ground that
it is not sufficiently central.

THE GUMPS—OUT OF THE MAIL BOX—

