

LaSalle Academy, 1973...

LaSalle Academy complex restored

Restored to its former architectural beauty, the historic LaSalle Academy complex in Ottawa is becoming a new centre of urban activity.

The heritage buildings on Sussex Drive, headquarters of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, not only testify to the colourful history of the capital, but are also part of the redevelopment of Bytown – the prosperous timber centre later renamed Ottawa.

By creating new centres of urban activity in buildings that date back to the nineteenth century, the Federal Government is applying its own policy of improving the physical and social environment of city cores.

Underlying principles of the National Housing Act, especially the Neighbourhood Improvement Program, include the conservation of structures that are still solid and the social and cultural continuity of neighbourhoods requiring renewal and rejuvenation.

Another policy the Federal Government is investigating is the management of federal property, taking into account its urban usefulness and integration within the surrounding environment.

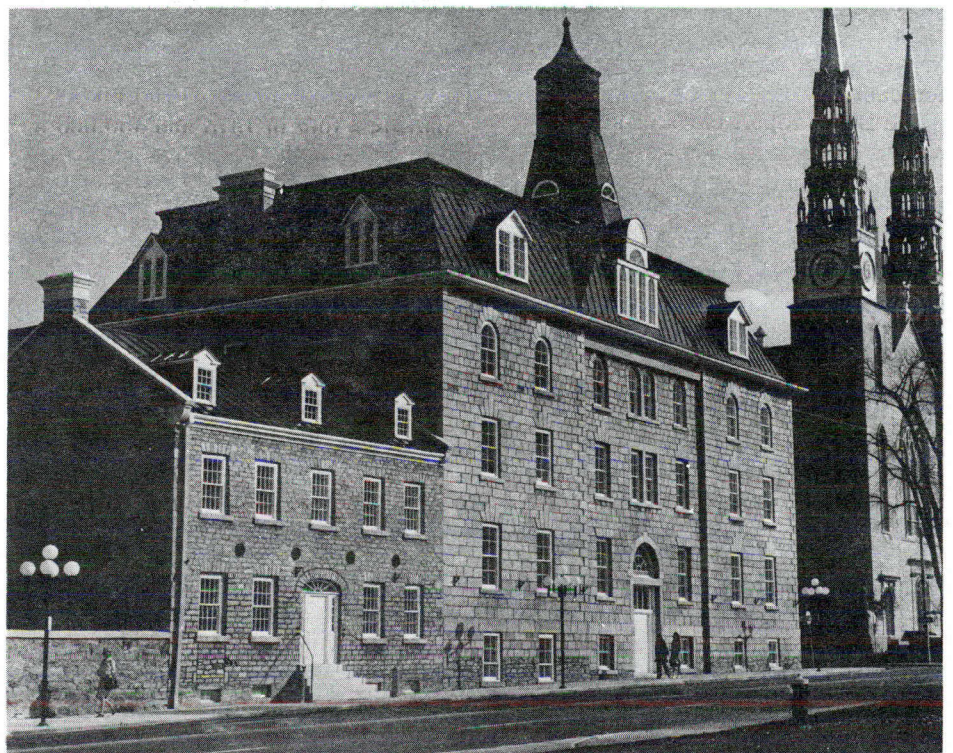
With this in mind, the Department of Public Works purchased LaSalle Academy for the headquarters of the young Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. This is a fitting site for the Ministry

...and (below) after restoration, 1975.

responsible for developing policies to improve the quality of life in Canadian cities and for promoting their integration in government programs.

The project was also designed to restore these buildings to harmonize with the rest of the neighbourhood. For this reason the back yard, once a parking lot, was designed as an inviting green space open to employees of the Ministry and residents of the area.

The Government thus acquired the



historic academy, parts of which have served as the home of the first Catholic Bishop in Ottawa, a private boys' school, hotel, military barracks, college and repertory theatre.

History of the buildings

The two oldest buildings, which face Sussex Drive, date back to the turbulent roots of Bytown. The first, smaller building to the north was a pioneer's house, made of roughly-hewn stone, supported by heavy cedar beams. It has the distinction of being one of the first stone buildings in Ottawa.

Fortunately, the walls, of this building – one foot thick – withstood the fire that gutted the College building in 1893.

The house, included in Ottawa directories for the first time in 1842, appears to have been built several years earlier by Thomas Donnelly, who rented it in 1847 to the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Ottawa, Monseigneur Joseph Eugene Bruno Guigues. He lived there until 1851, the year he moved into the Bishop's Palace.

College days

In 1852, Bytown College – a bilingual school for boys – was built next to the Donnelly house in a larger stone building which was needed to accommodate an increasing number of students.