

The Pumphouse

THE WATERWORKS BUILDING, 1882-83

The Stratford Water Supply Company was organized in 1881 by a number of prominent business and professional men of the town who were interested in providing water to homes and businesses and fire hydrants in town. The company purchased a property next to the Avon River on Romeo Street and contracted engineer John M. Moore and architect George Durand of London to design the pumphouse. Durand subsequently also designed the Perth County Courthouse and the Stratford Hospital (now Avoncrest) among many others before his early death at age 39.

In 1904, the Water Supply Company was wound up and the waterworks was taken over by the City of Stratford under the new Water Commission. The pumphouse originally took all its water from the river. The first artesian well was dug in 1905. In 1915 the Water Commission merged into the new Stratford Public Utilities Commission (now Festival Hydro).

The original building of 1882-83 consisted only of the northern portion. Besides a couple of additions to the original building, a matching building (southern portion) for the garages was eventually built by the PUC in the 1920s. A water tower, shown in the photo below, (now gone) was also constructed behind the building in 1916.

After eighty years of service the waterworks buildings were replaced by new buildings across the street. The old pumphouse and garage were declared surplus in 1964 and the city entertained proposals for what to do with the buildings.



TOP: THE PUMPHOUSE AND RESERVOIR, CIRCA 1945 (FROM THE SOUTH, SHOWING THE GARAGES IN THE NEWER BUILDING).

ABOVE: ROTHMAN'S ART GALLERY, CIRCA 1970.

LEFT: THE PUMPHOUSE AND RESERVOIR WITH THE WATER TOWER, CIRCA 1940 (FROM THE NORTH, SHOWING THE OLDER BUILDING WITH ITS ADDITION).

BELOW: ORIGINAL PUMPHOUSE AND SMOKESTACK IN THE 1880S, SHOWING THE RAILWAY BEHIND.

THE ART GALLERY

The Stratford Art Society was formed in 1945 and became very active after 1951 in holding classes, lectures and exhibits. By the early 1960s, the Society's exhibits had been attracting larger crowds than expected and it was felt that the time had come for a permanent local gallery. Their proposal for an art gallery in the old waterworks buildings was accepted as the best of three by city council, so the Society began its financial campaign.

The Society was transformed into the Stratford Art Association in 1966 and chose Robert Ihrig as the first director. He soon interested Rothman's of Pall Mall Canada Limited to sponsor the gallery with a large annual grant and the new Rothman's Art Gallery of Stratford opened in 1967. The two buildings were renovated and connected with a new entrance and reception area. Nearly one million dollars were spent by Rothman's over the next decade until it decided to withdraw its sponsorship in 1975.

The Art Association scrambled to raise more money from other sources including city council and reduced programs and staff to accommodate the lower budget. It was renamed Gallery Stratford and continues today as an important part of the cultural life of Stratford and the province, sponsoring local and travelling exhibits year-round.

