

The Core Area of the Port of Goderich

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Goderich's primary radiating streets, 99 feet in width, converge onto the circular road which is also 99 feet wide. Secondary streets are 66 feet wide. The central park covers about three acres. Added to the clarity of the radial design and ordered symmetry, is the alignment of the eight principal roads with the points of the compass.

The octagonal-shaped park at the centre was occupied for nearly 100 years by the original Huron County Courthouse, an Italianate brick building of imposing scale, massing and elegance. Ringed by eight commercial blocks, The Square reflects a vision of a town centre of classical design and elegance, possibly owing inspiration to formalized urban spaces like the London Nash Terraces and Bath Crescents, of England. The 1890s saw The Square come closest to achieving the elegance its radial plan promised. Although much has changed, a significant portion of the aesthetic and architectural value evident at that time, is still largely intact and still deserving of on-going maintenance and preservation.

From the 1840s to the 1890s, the growth of Goderich centered around the development of the Market Square. This fast growing town was the centre of a prosperous agricultural region and by the 1850s, had established itself as the social, economic and administrative centre for the District of Huron, an area much larger than the current County of Huron. From 1840 to 1852, Goderich was also the headquarters of the Canada Company which was responsible for opening up the 1.1 million acre Huron Tract for settlement.

Facts about Downtown Goderich, "The Square"

• The original focus of the market and civic square was east-west, with the entrances of the first courthouse facing East and West Streets. After this courthouse was destroyed by fire, the current one opened in 1956 with its entrances turned 90 degrees to be in alignment with North and South Streets. At one time, traffic circled The Square in both directions.



• Increased water traffic at the harbour (named Harbour of Refuge, 1872) and the arrival of the CP railway service in 1907, made West St. an important thoroughfare connecting the harbour and The Square. An even greater amount of rail and road traffic came to The Square via East Street and the Grand Trunk (later Canadian National) Railway Station. In 1924, a striking Soldiers' Memorial was built facing East Street to recall the men of Goderich marching around The Square and out East St. to the station on route to serve in WWI. A notable vista still exists from The Square along East Street to the now privately owned CN Railway Station (1902).

• The existing mature trees and lawns maintain the original intent for open space at the centre of the core. A farmers' market continues on summer Saturdays as a feature of life in The Square. A Victorian-styled bandstand replaced, in 2002, a gazebo removed from the park several decades ago. The new bandstand evokes the pleasures of earlier days and enhances the enjoyment of the park and octagonal streetscape.

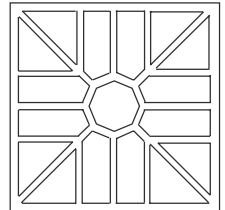
Port of Goderich

Heritage 1 Walking Tour (of 4)

"The Square" Heritage Conservation District

The Core Area of the Port of Goderich

The unique layout of Goderich's core encompasses eight primary streets radiating from an octagon bounded by eight business blocks. This octagon, marketplace or civic square, with a park at its centre, is popularly known as "The Square". Four streets intersecting at right angles -Victoria, Nelson, Waterloo and Elgin- form the outer edges of the core with the octagon in the centre.



"West Street" and "The Square" are two heritage conservation districts within this core area, designated by the Municipality of Goderich under the Ontario Heritage Act. In its early years, "The Square" was known as "Market Square" and its current legal address is "Courthouse Square".

The original concept for the core area has been attributed to John Galt, the Canada Company's first commissioner, and Deputy Provincial Surveyor, John McDonald, who were inspired by the first century B.C. planning concepts of Roman architect Vitruvius. These concepts were later translated into town plans by Renaissance architects.



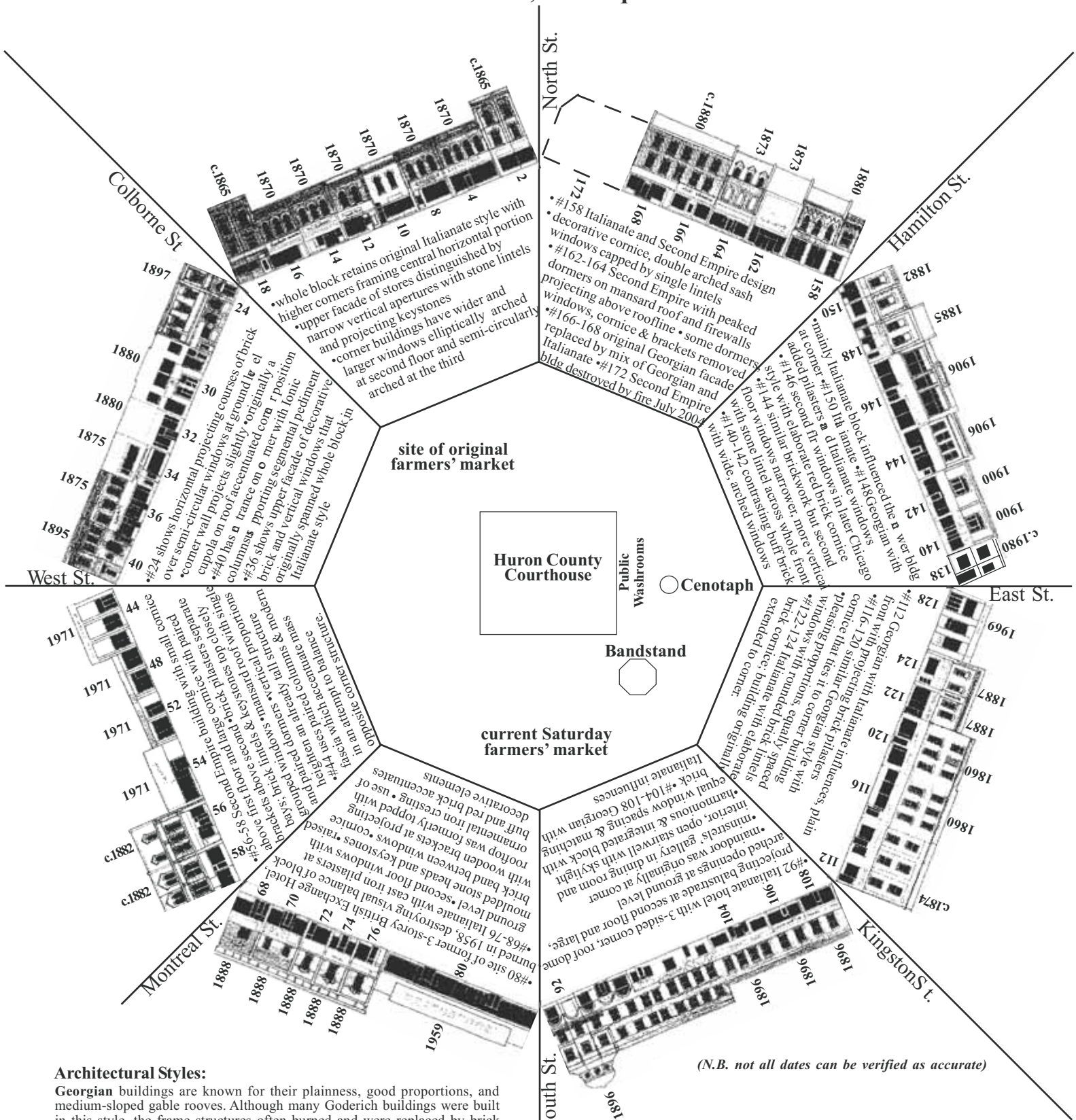
Goderich is a rare example of a town plan that was designed and surveyed in advance of any construction. Growth was not left to accident, nor to individual tastes, but planned especially to suit the flat ground upon which the core stands. The original town had developed at the harbour following 1827. Later, businesses relocated to the Market Square following the unveiling of the town plan in 1829.

Contrary to popular belief, Goderich's town plan was NOT switched with one meant for Guelph. It is likely that this myth arose from a struggle of wills between John Galt and The Canada Company Directors who were determined to name present-day Guelph 'Goderich' in honour of Lord Goderich. Galt, a royalist, was equally determined that his first settlement established in Upper Canada be called 'Guelph' and a second settlement, on Lake Huron, 'Goderich'. In that property deeds had been issued naming Goderich 'Goderich' and Guelph 'Guelph', Galt's preference prevailed since any change would have required passage of a colonial legislative act. The Directors, however, soon afterward dismissed John Galt. The town plans designed for these two communities were always intended for where they now exist.

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Downtown Goderich, "The Square"



Architectural Styles:

Georgian buildings are known for their plainness, good proportions, and medium-sloped gable roofs. Although many Goderich buildings were built in this style, the frame structures often burned and were replaced by brick buildings in other styles.

Italianate buildings are often very elaborate with oversized and bracketed entablature and cornices. Flat-roofed tops are not visible from the front. Many examples survive due to brick construction.

Second Empire buildings' most prominent feature is the mansard roof. The style is similar to Italianate in its elaborate, bracketed cornices, full-sized pilasters and similar-sized openings. Many examples can be found in Goderich.

Sources:

Hill, Nicholas. *The "Square" Goderich: A Heritage Conservation District Plan*. c.1977.
 Rutledge, John. *Understanding Commercial Blocks in Goderich*, 1999.

Architectural Glossary:

- bracket:** A decorative member which projects from a wall where a pilaster and an entablature meet.
- cornice:** A decorative horizontal projection forming the top of an entablature or forming the exterior trim of a building either where the wall meets the roof or between two floors.
- entablature:** A horizontal board over a beam supported by columns or pilasters, commonly referred to as a signboard but not always used for signs.
- pilaster:** A half or partial column which may be structural or constructed as a projection of the wall itself; pilasters are sometimes found with a capital or bracket, shaft and base.