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IN THE MATTER OF THE ONTARIO HERITAGE ACT, R.S.O. 1990,  
CHAPTER O.18

AND IN THE MATTER OF THE LANDS AND PREMISES AT THE  
FOLLOWING MUNICIPAL ADDRESSES IN THE TOWN OF  
PRESCOTT IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

**NOTICE OF PASSING OF BY-LAWS**

TAKE NOTICE that the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Prescott passed By-Laws 07-96 and 08-96 to designate that following properties as being of architectural and historical value or interest under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter O.18:

- (a) 724 King Street West (Frank Wiser Home)
- (b) 741 King Street West (Isaac Wiser Home)

The Wiser properties represent a significant legacy of Prescott's historical and architectural heritage. The properties show the evolution and changes in lifestyle and design of riverfront and town properties. The buildings represent significant original structure and later change.

Further information and a full copy of the reasons for designation are available for inspection at the municipal offices, 360 Dibble St. W. during regular business hours.

Dated at the Town of Prescott this 6th day of March 1996.

  
Andrew Brown  
Clerk

# CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF PRESCOTT

## BY-LAW 07-96

Being a by-law to designate the property known municipally as the Isaac Wisser Home, 741 King Street West as being of historical and architectural value or interest

**WHEREAS** Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter O.18 authorizes the Council of a municipality to enact by-laws to designate real property, including all buildings and structures thereon, to be of architectural or historical value or interest;

**AND WHEREAS** the local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (Heritage Prescott) recommends to Council that the exterior of the building at 741 King Street West in Prescott be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act for the reasons set out in Schedule "A" attached hereto;

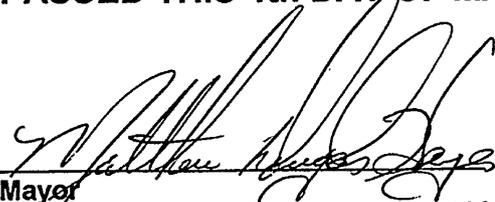
**AND WHEREAS** the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Prescott has caused to be served on the owners of the lands and premises known as the Isaac Wisser Home, 741 King Street West in Prescott its notice of intention to so designate the aforesaid real property and has caused such notice of intention to be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the municipality once for each of three consecutive weeks;

**AND WHEREAS** Council deems it expedient to designate the subject real property as being of architectural and historical value and interest

**NOW THEREFORE** the Council of the Corporation of the Town of Prescott enacts as follows:

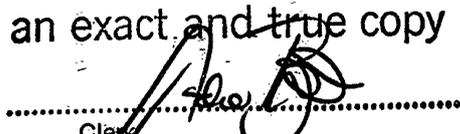
1. That the Issac Wisser Home located at 741 King Street, Prescott, more particularly described as Lots 41, 43, 44 and Part of Lot 42, Block 3, Plan 19 on the south side of King Street is hereby designate as being of architectural and historical value and interest pursuant to the *Ontario Heritage Act*.
2. The Clerk is hereby authorized to cause a copy of this by-law together with the reasons for designation as detailed in the attached schedule to be registered against the property described above in the local Land Registry Office.
3. The Clerk is hereby authorized to cause a copy of this by-law to be served on the owner of the subject property and on the Ontario Heritage Foundation and to cause notice of the passing of this by-law to be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the Town of Prescott.
4. Schedule "A" attached hereto forms part of this by-law as if recited in full herein.
5. This by-law shall come into force and take effect upon final passage.

**READ A FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD TIME AND FINALLY PASSED THIS 4th DAY OF MARCH 1996**

  
Mayer

  
Clerk

I certify this to be  
an exact and true copy

  
.....  
Clerk  
Town of Prescott

## **Reasons for Designation**

The three properties recommended for designation are situated along the St. Lawrence River on the municipal Boundary of the Town of Prescott. The Kate Wiser-Brown Home and the Isaac Wiser Home are sited along the river, and the Frank Wiser Home is situated directly to the north across Highway #2. They are among the most prominent buildings in the Town of Prescott and dominate the western entrance to the community as Fort Wellington does the eastern entrance.

It is felt that these three Wiser properties represent a significant legacy of Prescott's Historical and Architectural Heritage for the reasons given, but perhaps of greater importance, they show the evolution and changes in lifestyle and design of riverfront and town properties in the Town of Prescott. They possess a common bond of history through the Wiser name, but each has its own unique character, and each has been shaped by successive owners. In every case the buildings represent qualities of original structure and later change. Far from discouraging this pattern it is intended through these designations that past and present changes be recognized and protected, but that future changes may be treated with some flexibility.

Derek Thain  
Heritage Prescott

## **Isaac Wiser Home**

The Isaac Wiser home was the first of three wedding gifts to his children built by J.P. Wiser. The property was granted by John to his son Isaac in 1892. There was a small structure on the site at that time. Extensive additions were constructed during the following year.

The original building was extended to the west to nearly four times its original length, and raised to that of a 2 1/2 story structure. The interior was decorated with extensive woodwork, probably more to the father's tastes than the son's, in particular the front Hall, staircase and Dining Room. The fireplace surround in the front hall is distinctly English in carving and detail and is representative of much of the work found in Rushton Hall. Between 1892 and 1893 the Evaluation Rolls for the Town of Prescott increased the value of this property from \$700 to \$3500.

Isaac Philip Wiser was born August 20, 1868 and died in 1930. He was mayor of Prescott during 1918 and 1919.

In 1926 the property was purchased by Arza Clair Casselman MP. He was party whip for 35 years from the R.B. Bennett Government until his death in 1958. His wife Jean Casselman was elected to her husband's seat of Grenville-Dundas the same year.

The room has been a popular entertainment centre for MPs, Senators, Prime Ministers and Governor Generals for nearly seventy years.

## **741 King Street West**

J.P. Wiser had this home built for his son Isaac in 1892-93. Isaac Wiser went on to serve as Mayor of Prescott in 1918-19. After Wiser, the property was purchased by Azra Clair Casselman, MP, long-time party whip for the R.B. Bennett government until his death in 1958. MPs, Senators, Prime Ministers and Governors General have been entertained within these walls for nearly seventy years.

A large two-and-one-half storey cross-gable house in the Queen Anne Revival tradition, the building is characterized by its elaborate interplay of gables, roof forms, prominent chimneys, finish materials, window sizes and types; by its finely detailed and executed interior millwork; and by its prominent, simply landscaped site overlooking the St. Lawrence River.

The composition is typical of the style, with its irregular elevations, prominent chimney stacks and projecting round gallery. Features essential to the design include the differentiation of the levels of the building through finish materials (red brick at the base, with wood-frame upper storey and gables clad in shingle) and through prominent horizontal banding (wood "string courses" and heavy friezeboards under the eaves and within gables). Texture and colour are emphasized, through the choice of shaped and coloured wood shingles and decorative brickwork. The building has unfortunately lost some of its intended character through the replacement of roof, gable and side-wall shingles with asphalt. The original wood shingles and associated wood trim may have been painted in a complex colour scheme in keeping with late Victorian era residences of this nature.

The window pattern is of interest for its irregularity and variety, again typical of the style: two casement windows with ornate cartouche-like heads straddle the line between ground and upper floors, providing a clue as to the location of the main stairwell. A single pair of French doors with curved glazing survive in the parlour, giving access to the circular gallery facing the dramatic river view. The Palladian window in one gable is a classically inspired detail thrown in to the eclectic mix for good measure.

If the exterior is somewhat sedate when compared to other examples of the style, this is compensated for by the interior, with its irregular plan, sumptuous woodwork and fine hardware. The principal rooms are differentiated from each other by distinctive wood species, profiles and designs, and by fireplace surrounds of different types and materials. A view through the main floor is made possible by a series of large arched doorways; this perception of a sequential arrangement of spaces contributes to the intended graciousness of the interior plan. The level of detail and finish changes from storey to storey, with no diminishment of quality. Elegant brass doorknobs and hinges are found throughout.

The site is altered, but retains its formal character and sweeping views to the river. Any site changes which would impact views from or to the property should be discouraged.

## John Philip Wiser

John Philip Wiser was born in 1825, the son of a Dutch farmer in upper New York State. He made his money as a drover, buying and selling cattle.

In 1867 he became a partner in the Averill & Egert distillery in Prescott. A year later when the buildings caught fire and were burned to the ground he rebuilt it and took ownership. His interest was not the distillery itself, but the by-products of the distillation process. He believed that the waste mash from the distillery could be used as a high quality feed in cattle farming. He built a malt house in 1858, and barns for 1800-2000 head of cattle on a 600 acre farm west of Prescott (now Riverview Heights). When the Civil War started a few years later he was positioned to do well in sales of beef and Whiskey. The Distillery became the heart of an impressive operation which consumed immense quantities of grain and produced volumes of reputedly fine whiskey. In 1885 a ten gallon keg of whiskey sold for \$16.50, which included \$1.35 a gallon in taxes. He was proven correct in his use of the waste products as cattle feed. A contemporary wrote

*"It costs nearly one million dollars per annum to run the works. The duties paid the Government average two thousand dollars per day. The storehouses will hold one hundred thousand bushels of grain. The establishment gives employment to about 60 men, besides 3 Government officials to attend to the collection of duties."*

J.P. Wiser made a success in both of these businesses, an 10,000 acre ranch in Kansas (which he was later forced to sell due to restrictions on foreign ownership), and a Brick yard. The later was initiated when J.P. realized that farmers would sell the wood used as fuel very cheaply to clear their land.

The Wiser families greatest popularity was due to their business/hobby of horse breeding and racing. The stallion *Rysdyk*, son of *Hambletonian* was purchased in 1874 for \$10,000, an enormous sum, and was used to sire an

improved breed in Grenville County. A large and stately U-shaped barn was constructed (now the site of Blazing Saddles), and named **Rysdyk Stock Farm**. Wiser also owned a half interest in the stallion *Phil Sheridan*. He stood at stud in Prescott, and was widely acclaimed as the "best stock horse" in the country. The recognition of the importance of Prescott to the racing community was such that the Queen's Plate was held here. (The sight is now the area around South Grenville District High School.)

J.P. Wiser was an adamant non-drinker and was elected in 1878 to the fourth Parliament after Confederation by a slim vote. It was said at the time that the Prescott deputy returning officer had let his finger nails grow long at the time, presumably to conceal a piece of graphite and deface ballots. He ran on a Reform ticket, and ran on a Temperance platform. He had an election jingle which ran:

*"Come all ye Sons of Temperance  
Wherever ye may be  
And vote for J.P. Wiser  
Of the Big Distillery  
He also is a farmer  
And raises corn and hay  
And keeps good breeds of horses  
So all the people say."*

One son Harlow predeceased his parents. Remaining children Isaac, Frank, and Kate inherited the business. Kate married an American Consulting Engineer named William Clinton Brown and became an American citizen.

J.P. Wiser lived in a small unpretentious house in Prescott until the 1880's when he built **Rushton Hall** at a cost of \$100,000. This building sat vacant from the 1920's until 1947 when it was renovated and reopened. It was demolished in the 1950's to make way for a gas station. (The site now includes the Health Clinic.)

J.P. Wiser gave houses to each of his three surviving children as wedding gifts. All of these survive and are intended to continue as such through these designations.

## **SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUE:**

### **724, 741 and 763 King Street West, Prescott, Ontario**

In response to a request from Heritage Prescott, the properties noted above were visited on November 6, 1995 by Natalie Bull, a member of the Advisory Board of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Interiors as well as exteriors were considered, with the exception of the interior of 763 King Street West.

In response to the central question, which is whether any of these properties merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act, I provide the following analysis:

While none of these buildings can be said to have a strong architectural value on its own, together they clearly have historical, architectural and contextual (environmental) value that should be protected.

Historically, all three of these buildings are of interest for their association with J.P. Wiser of Wiser whisky fame, who played a prominent role in Prescott and environs from the mid-nineteenth century onward, and who gave the properties as wedding gifts to three of his offspring. It is my understanding that both the distillery and J.P.'s own home have not survived, therefore the existence of these homes, in close proximity to each other, may present a rare opportunity to recognize the importance of the Wiser name in Prescott. The building at 741 has an additional layer of significance due to its association with twentieth century Canadian political figures.

Architecturally, these buildings taken together illustrate the stylistic developments in large-scale residential design from the mid-nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century: 724, with its classically-inspired proportions and overlay of Italianate features; 741, a rambling mansion replete with Victorian eclecticism; and 763, a massive "modern" hybrid representing the rejection of Victorian-era exuberance in favour of a sleeker, more restrained design.

As a grouping of structures associated with the Wiser name, the three buildings together with their sites form an enclave that has value as a cultural landscape. These large buildings on prominent sites, two of them with commanding positions on the river and all with strong building-site relationships, establish the character of the precinct, which recalls an era of privilege and gracious living on sprawling estates in dramatic settings. I feel that architectural context (that is, the relationship between each building and its site, and the larger relationships among the three properties) is as strong a reason for designation here as are the historical associations.

Designation of each or all of these properties under the Act should not be construed as automatically restricting changes in use or occupancy. The goal of heritage conservation (and of designation under the Heritage Act) is not to freeze buildings in time, but to

provide mechanisms for managing change such that the character of the building and site is not compromised. Designation would not eliminate the possibility of alterations and additions, but would instead apply heritage conservation principles (respect for existing forms and materials, compatibility and distinguishability of new work, minimum intervention, reversibility) in evaluating applications to alter these properties. The goal is to ensure the continuing viability of the building, while minimizing impact on heritage character.