

Community Heritage Ontario Conference, 18-20 June 2026

Overview prepared on behalf of the ACO Hamilton Region Branch.

The 2026 Ontario Heritage Conference, hosted in Hamilton from June 18–20, embraced the theme "Forged in Steel, Steeped in History", highlighting the city's industrial legacy and its evolving identity. This theme explored the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings and landscapes, showcasing how former factories, mills, and infrastructure could be transformed into vibrant, functional spaces while preserving their historical character. The conference offered a mix of keynote panels, workshops, and guided walking tours through Hamilton's architectural and industrial landscapes. Organized by [Community Heritage Ontario](#)Ham and the Local Organizing Committee, which included volunteers from ACO Hamilton, the [Hamilton Municipal Heritage Committee](#) and the [Hamilton/Burlington Society of Architects](#), the conference was attended by close to 250 delegates and was deemed to be a great success.

DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMMING

- Thursday, June 18: The event kicked off at Magnolia Hall (the former St. Mark's Anglican Church) with a public panel discussion focused on reimagining Hamilton's waterfront, Stelco lands, and industrial heritage.
- Friday, June 19: Centered at LIUNA Station, sessions explored circular economies and the conservation of existing buildings. Walking tours were conducted of the Coppley Building, Central Neighbourhood, and the Industrial North-End Waterfront Trail and the former Custom House ([WAHC](#)). This site also hosted the Vendor Marketplace, with table displays for local authors, heritage specialists and consultants, and several heritage organizations and committees. Following the afternoon sessions and walking tours an AGM for CHO members and the Gala Dinner with presentations took place.
- Saturday, June 20: Activities moved to the historic Sherman Avenue industrial area, featuring an opening keynote speaker panel at the Playhouse Cinema, open studios and a Traditional Trades Fair demonstrating hands-on historic restoration skills at the Cotton Factory. Tours included the Cotton Factory and an industrial heritage bus tour of Hamilton's waterfront including the 1859 Hamilton Waterworks ([Hamilton Museum of Steam and Technology](#)) led by Sandra Iskandar and Ian Kerr-Wilson.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

The conference panels tackled various contemporary challenges in historical preservation. A major highlight was the presentation of a joint study by Community Heritage Ontario and Archaeological Research Associates Ltd. (ARA) regarding the availability and affordability of residential property insurance for properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, Part IV and Part 5 ([Residential Property Insurance and Heritage Designation Study – Community Heritage Ontario](#)).

The **Traditional Trades Fair** organized by Ashleigh Bell and Megan Hobson was a highlight of the conference for anyone interested in heritage crafts and trades. This session was hosted at the Cotton Factory, a former textile mill in Hamilton's industrial sector that is now the largest art centre and creative hub in the city. Tours of the adaptively-reused industrial complex were given by the owner Rob Zeldler and there were open studios, craft demonstrations and talks. The Trade Fair and cafe in the Imperial Cotton Room featured ten exhibitors and lunch was served in the outdoor courtyard with food trucks and picnic tables set up for delegates. The event was sponsored by *Sage Restoration*, suppliers of linseed oil and lime mortars and other specialized heritage materials and tools used in conservation work.

EXHIBITORS

- [Sage Restoration](#) (linseed oil and other restoration products)
- [Lori LeMare Studio](#) (restoration of architectural finishes)
- [H Stone](#) (stone masonry and restoration)
- [Adrian Scortea](#), Burlington (stone carving)
- [Lower City Joinery](#) (restoration of heritage millwork)
- [John Storey Stained Glass](#)
- [Two Rivers Restoration](#) (historic masonry repair)
- [Heritage Mill](#) (historic building conservation and architectural millwork)
- [Hamilton SignCraft](#) (traditional signwriting, gold leaf, hand-carved signs)
- [Willowbank School of Restoration Arts](#)

CONFERENCE VENUES

Magnolia Hall, 115 Hunter Street West, Hamilton

Built in 1877 in the Gothic Revival style, Magnolia Hall is a beautiful example of adaptive re-use of a former place of worship. As an Anglican church, St. Mark's served the community for over 100 years before closing in 1989 and sat vacant until its re-opening in 2025. Now owned by the City of Hamilton, the site has undergone extensive restoration, preserving the heritage character of the building and park, while adding modern services, gardens and accessibility. It now has a new life as a community arts and cultural programming space. This property is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.



City of Hamilton [photo](#)

WSP – Downtown Hamilton Office, 41 King William Street, Suite 401, Hamilton

Located only one block from Gore Park, The Empire Times is a significant revitalization project in Hamilton's central core, completed by [Core Urban Inc.](#) The project included the combination of two buildings, the addition of a glass-encased two-sided elevator servicing all floors, and the addition of a rooftop patio. The extensive interior renovations opened up large contemporary office spaces with exposed brick walls and ductwork. The Empire Times is home to a variety of restaurants and creative businesses and studios. This property is currently listed on the Municipal Heritage Register.

LIUNA Station Banquet & Conference Centre, 360 James Street North, Hamilton

Constructed between 1929 -1931 by the Canadian National Railway and designed by architect John Schofield, this neoclassical style train station served both freight and passenger travel until its closure in 1993. After standing vacant for several years, the Labourer's International Union of North America (LIUNA) purchased the station and undertook renovations to reopen in 2000 as [LIUNA Station](#). The property is designated under the federal Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act and under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act by the City of Hamilton, and is also recognized as a National Historic Site.



Hamilton/ Burlington Society of Architects [photo](#)

Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC), 51 Stuart Street, Hamilton

The former Custom House (1858-60) is one of the oldest remaining ‘federal’ public buildings in Canada and a fine example of the Italianate style. Designed by Hamilton architect Frederick J. Rastrick and Frederick P. Rubridge (Department of Public Works), its style and construction reflect the rise of Hamilton as a major railway centre and Great Lakes port. Over its history, the building has housed many uses including Customs Department, school, YWCA, residential accommodations, vinegar factory, offices for the American Computing Company and Empire Wool Stock Company, a macaroni factory and a martial arts academy. Purchased in 1995 and re-opened as the Workers Arts & Heritage Centre, the property is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act and recognized as a National Historic Site.

Playhouse Cinema, 177 Sherman Avenue North, Hamilton

Constructed in 1914, over its long history, the building provided a space for vaudeville and motion pictures. In the 1960s it became Hamilton's premier Italian Cinema but closed in 1990 as a commercial cinema and then accommodated a Christian arts program for inner city kids for about 20 years. The property was purchased in 2018 by Wendy, Jacob and John Tutt (Princess Cinemas, Waterloo) and was subsequently restored with its beautiful Art Deco details. The building once again functions as an independently owned and operated, single-screen theatre, known as the [Playhouse Cinema](#). This property is currently listed on the City's Heritage Register but is not yet designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Cotton Factory, 270 Sherman Avenue North, Hamilton

This historic 1900 industrial complex formerly known as The Imperial Cotton Company, Hamilton's second largest cotton mill, is a prime example of adaptive reuse. A multitude of spaces have been transformed into workshops, galleries, office space for creative professionals and studios for artists, now known as [The Cotton Factory](#). This property is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.



Tripadvisor [photo](#)

INTERIOR PHOTOS

Vendor Marketplace, LIUNA Station, and the Cotton Factory, June 19 and 20. Professional photography by T.H. Ponders.



Hamilton Region Board members and conference volunteers, Sue Hanna and Ann Gillespie, with one of the new branch banners, Vendor Marketplace.



Shannon Kyles with her latest publication, *The Story of Ontario Architecture* (2025), Vendor Marketplace.



Adrian Scortea demonstrating stone carving at the Cotton Factory.



Alan Stacey, *Heritage Mill*, demonstrating his woodworking skills at the Cotton Factory.



Sage Restoration products on display at the Cotton Factory.



Lori LeMare explaining the art of restoring architectural finishes at the Cotton Factory.