# Alumnus donation allows University of Ottawa to restore heritage house in campus's historical sector

Michel Prévost, University of Ottawa chief archivist

Thanks to the generosity of alumnus Gaston Héon (1934-1993), the University of Ottawa has been able to restore one of the most beautiful heritage houses on campus. The restoration follows a $2 million donation, the largest amount ever bequeathed by an individual to the University. The building, located at the corner of Séraphin Marion (formerly Wilbrod) and Cumberland, has regained its splendour of yesteryear. Of course, only a very small part of the bequest went to the repairing the house; the majority of Héon's donation will be used to establish scholarships for students in the Department of History and the School of Music.

Héon, from a family of modest means in Victoriaville, Quebec, began studying medicine at the University of Ottawa in the 1960s. He withdrew from university for lack of funds, becoming an administrator of seniors' homes in Northern Ontario. Through this career, he became a well-to-do businessman.

In 1991, Gaston Héon returned to the University of Ottawa, to obtain an honour's bachelor in history. Unfortunately, he didn't achieve this dream, at least not in his lifetime, as he died of a heart attack before completing all his courses. The University Senate nevertheless sought to express its gratitude for the major bequest Héon had left by awarding him a posthumous degree October 25, 1998. As well, the restored home is now named for him. A commemorative wall plaque was unveiled October 23 of the same year, with University dignitaries and members of the Héon family in attendance.

Built in 1875, the semidetached Second Empire house was purchased by the University in 1920. In the 1960s, the building was painted gray all over to show that it belonged to the University, gray being one of the University's official colours. In doing so, the beautiful red stone and rich details, particularly above the windows, were hidden. In short, the oldest house on the street slowly deteriorated over the years and its architectural riches remained well hidden.

Thanks to the Héon donation, the house has regained some of its former lustre. The paint was sandblasted, and the brick and mortar were carefully repaired. All that's missing are the stately porches, which were removed in the 1980s. The restoration has brought out the high quality brick as well as the elegant fanlights and the beautiful doors and windows of the building, home to the Department of History. It has also highlighted other heritage buildings in the area. In fact, with the former École normale, now Hagen Hall, Academic Hall, and four restored century-old homes, Séraphin Marion has become one of the most interesting streets for Sandy Hill's built heritage. So why not discover the unique character of this part of the University of Ottawa's historical sector.