

Finnish Labour Temple
314 Bay Street



Year Built: 1910

Architect: C.W. Wheeler and Fred Urry

Notable Features: Central polygonal tower with a gallery or porch

Internationally renowned Hoito Finnish pancakes

Designation Date: April 8th, 1991

By-Law No.: 74 - 1991

Legal Description: Plan 317 Lot 11

Current Owner: The Finnish Building Company Limited

Description:

The Finnish Labour Temple is the result of the union between two organizations: the Finnish New Attempt Temperance Society and the Finnish-American Workers' League Imatra #9. The societies had been operating, since the turn of the century, from modest-sized building that, by 1908 proved inadequate. The Imatra reported having difficulties controlling children how caused a commotion in their small meeting hall, and more room was needed to stage the plays and concerts that had become fixtures of the societies. Memberships were on the rise for these organizations, but funding was a constant problem, as most of the members were general labourers and without expendable money. It was therefore out of necessity that the separate societies united to build the Finnish Labour Temple of 314 Bay Street.

Difficulties arose during the construction of the Labour Temple, most notably a controversial exchange between the bricklayer, Mr. A. Allen and the Finnish Building Company (in whose name the Labour Temple was purchased). Allen was awarded the contract based upon his offer of \$13 per 1000 bricks. The project was delayed because it was discovered that the bricks which had been purchased for the job were insufficiently fired. Winter arrived while the Finnish Building Company (FBC) scrambled to find replacement bricks, and so it was that Allen began the brick-laying work in very cold

weather. The FBC confronted Allen about the poor quality of craftsmanship and threatened him with reduced pay. The altercation escalated over the next few months, resulting in Allen suing the FBC, and the FBC counter-suing Allen, and one member of the committee spending an evening in jail. Ultimately, the case was brought before a rather primitive court and it was decided upon that Allen would finish the job and receive full pay.

There were also some disputes that arose between the Temperance Society and the Worker's League, despite a fairly amicable amalgamation. One of the main points of conflict developed regarding affiliation with the Canadian Socialist Party. The Worker's League continually put pressure upon members of the Society to adopt a more formally Socialist stance, and, since the Worker's League held the majority of the shares to the Labour Temple they essentially became sole operators of the building. Perhaps this is the reason why, in 1910, the announcement for the Finnish Building Company's general meeting read that the meeting would take place in the "Port Arthur Finnish Socialist Local's Temple." This announcement was promptly revised.

The building held its' grand opening, a three day long event, in March of 1910. Shortly after, the basement was rented out to the Finnish Publishing Company for \$50 per month plus utilities. The hall became the epicenter of the Finnish community in Port Arthur, and was used as a site for dances and theatrical productions. Less than a decade after the construction of the Bay Street Finnish Labour Temple, a group of Finnish bush workers decided that a cheap, home-cooked meal was essential for their days spent in town. Fifty-nine people chipped in \$5 each and began the co-operatively owned Hoito Restaurant, with a cafeteria style lay-out and all you could eat buffet for only a 25¢.

The Hoito (which means 'care' in Finnish) has become both locally and internationally renowned. One employee, in 1988, estimated that upwards of 800 meals were served daily. Although the restaurant has been changed from cafeteria-style to a sit down eatery, the menu is quite similar to the original menu and includes viili (clabbered milk), mojakka (meat stew) and kala mojakka (fish stew). The Hoito's Finnish pancakes are a Thunder Bay staple.

The Finnish Labour Temple building changed hands in 1962, when it was bought out by the Finlandia Club of Port Arthur. Despite the change of management the programs and productions offered at the building are quite similar to the events of nearly a century ago. The site has been home to a host of Finnish newspapers, theatrical productions, concerts, motion pictures, sporting events and festivals.



Architecture:

The plan of this brick veneer building consists of two centrally hipped squares joined by a long gabled section in the middle. The façade (two storeys high, with a storey below the base course) has a central three storey semi-detached polygonal tower. The top storey of the tower has insul-brick siding. The tower roof is polygonal pyramidal and its topped by a glass enclosed cupola with a small chatri roof and a lightning rod. A central porch with two columns supports the tower over the first storey; the main entranceway, consisting of a modern glass door, is in the porch and leads onto a concrete stoop with steps leading off to the sides. This was originally one flight of steps leading onto Bay Street, but with the addition of the Hoito Restaurant, in the basement of the Finnish Labour Temple, in 1918, it became two to accommodate restaurant entrance.

Flanking the entranceway on either side of the first storey is a triplet of windows consisting of a large central and thinner side windows. On the second storey the tower has a door leading on to the porch roof and the flanking bays have each a pair of windows. Just under the eaves there is a stone course across the façade.

The end bays of the façade are occupied by square towers; they each have, on the first storey a two-sided oriel window with a curved roof, a pair of windows on the second, and a triplet of windows under one lintel on the third storey. The tower tops are slightly battlemented with shallow semi-elliptical crenellation; both of the towers have lightning rods.

The east wall of the front hipped section is regularly fenestrated and has a door on the first storey. Abutted to the gabled central section is a one storey stuccoed addition with a shed roof. There is a metal fire-escape that leads to a door on the second.

The rear wall is sparsely fenestrated. There is a tall brick chimney at the rear. The brickwork at the top of the tower is not original.¹

¹ Finlandia Club Hall, *History and Description* City of Thunder Bay Heritage Sites Archives



The 'new' Hoito front entranceway
below the Finlandia Club

For more information regarding the history of the Finnish New Attempt Temperance Society and the Finnish-American Worker's League Imatra #9, please read chapter 9 of the book "Project Bay Street," published in 1989.

For more information regarding the history of the Finnish Labour Temple and the Hoito, please visit the *Finnish Heritage Building Fund's* website and view their "recommended reading and watching" list:

<http://www.hoito.ca/article/history-of-the-finnish-labour-temple-4.asp>