

## The Haldimand Library + Heritage Centre

By Canadian Architect — On Oct 1, 2019



Located in the heart of Cayuga, a small town on the Grand River in Ontario, the Haldimand Library + Heritage Centre opened in early August this year. It brings together a local library branch with a museum and genealogy centre, and was designed by [TCA | Thier + Curran Architects](#). According to the architects, the project was delivered at about half the cost per square foot of other libraries—"a significant success."



Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects

"The library in a small town is one of the few opportunities for architecture and culture to touch the daily lives of residents, so it is critically important for it to inspire and engage, to become the community's living room and a hub of community life," say the architects.

At the same time, they note, "Small towns tend to be more conservative, myopic, afraid of risks and hesitant to embrace new ideas. Building Committees are usually made up of first time clients who are particularly worried about criticism and tend towards 'safe' decisions, and often have trouble looking past personal choices and envisioning themselves into the shoes of the users instead."



Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects

The tight budget was also a challenge. “It is hard enough to create great architecture with a generous budget, but it is far, far more difficult to tease a good building out of a very modest budget. One has to be particularly creative and nimble to magically turn inexpensive materials and systems into impactful design,” they say.

Throughout the design, the architects strove to keep the entire community in mind. “Designing for the lens and needs of the three-year-olds of the community, not for the 60-year-olds actually paying the bills and shepherding the project to fruition, is a tricky path to navigate. We focused on building a library/museum not to mimic one aspect of Cayuga in 1910 but to inspire and engage Cayuga looking to 2050 and embrace a new, modern future. We know that communities are not frozen in time.”



*Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects*

The building engages the historic town core opposite the site, and fronts a small parkette. Maintaining the urban fabric, the building is placed at the sidewalk line, with parking kept to the rear.

Scaled carefully to sit comfortably within its small-town context, the facility’s dramatic stepped sloping metal roof and angled brick museum “storefront” ensure it reads dominantly as a public building.

The use of tumbled red brick with a common bonding pattern connects to the historic commercial buildings opposite, while the corrugated metal siding and standing rib metal roofing creates a modern and distinctive image, but also reflects the County’s agricultural heritage.



*Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects*

Cedar soffits add a refined elegance and warmth to an otherwise modest exterior, and they are raked and chamfered as an opportunity to add sculptural emphasis.

Varied panels of brick and siding interlock, and differing window sizes and patterning create a dynamic composition to bring the simple and staid façade to life.

Constructed of stepped, asymmetrical yet conventional wood trusses for economy, the facility's roof is a distinctive feature. The trusses have been left exposed throughout the majority of the interiors to create high, lofty spaces, and all are painted for visual consistency and economy.

The Heritage Centre fronts onto Talbot Street with large corner display windows to bring museum exhibits to the public. Its small footprint has been maximized with a combination of built-in and moveable display cases and the potential for exhibits to be hung from the roof trusses above or mounted on the portal frame doorways.

In one corner of the library, a Youth Area is tucked away as a defined space, featuring a custom booth with a dramatic 'roof' structure.

Opposite the Youth Area is the Children's Area, where reading nooks and display shelves with bold colours encourage children to escape with a book.



*Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects*

An L-shaped circulation desk serves both the Library and Genealogy Centre, allowing staff to easily serve and survey all spaces, with varied wood veneers and sculpted planes of solid surface materials turning it into a feature.

The Haldimand County Library and Heritage Centre is an illustration of architecture crafted to serve and inspire its rural community.

While simple, economical, and efficient, the Library/Museum has bold architectural ambitions, looking forward to the future and to beyond the County limits.



*Photo Courtesy of TCA | Thier + Curran Architects*