

## Window restoration gives soul back to Sharon Temple

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If windows truly are the eyes to a building's soul, the 180-year-old Sharon Temple stands soulless as the windows are being removed as part of a restoration program by the museum society.

Almost 3,000 panes were removed and sent to a glass studio in Toronto and the windows are boarded up with black-painted plywood.



Sharon Temple Museum curator John McIntyre awaits the return of his second storey windows which are being repaired.

The temple houses one of the largest collections of early 19th century mouth-blown glass from England, said John Wilcox, a heritage glass glazier who is restoring the windows.

"It is quite remarkable that these brittle, transparent, wafer-thin panes of glass continue to illuminate after nearly two centuries of exposure," he said.

The putty holding the glass has failed over time, temple museum curator and director John McIntyre said.

"The original panes of glass are falling out," he said. "We're losing the original glass because of the rain and the snow."

Not only is this one of the oldest and largest collections of glass in the country, the temple structure and the ratio between wall and window is remarkable for the era in which it was built.

"I see the temple as a glass building with wood. The ratio of window to wall is quite adventurous for its day," Mr. Wilcox said. "There is clarity all around, inside the building."

The building has its own unique history, as do the materials used to build it.

The glass was shipped from England and carried by horse and wagon from York to Sharon. The panes were packed in barrels of molasses, Mr. McIntyre said.

"These weren't manufactured en mass," he said. "It's traditional craftsmanship from England."

The first storey windows were restored about a decade ago. Most of the damage or loss of glass is from the second and third storey windows and the temple's lanterns, Mr. Wilcox said.

"The upper windows suffer from extreme exposure," he said. "(The windows) sit above most of the trees and up on the edge of the valley."

Many original panes were broken during the 50 years the temple sat abandoned. The broken windows were replaced around the 1920s.

"What remains is a myriad of glass, resulting in that uniquely enjoyable optical variation in light," Mr. Wilcox said.

Handling one of Canada's oldest portions of glass is not a task taken lightly. Mr. Wilcox and a team of professional glaziers reset each pane in a fresh bed of putty, using patience, dexterity and the same old-world methods to recreate the glass.

"We're not travelling by horse and buggy and we have electricity," he said. "But the re-glazing part is almost the same, done by hand."

The museum is appealing to members and residents to help fund the massive restoration project, which costs more than \$50,000. Last year, East Gwillimbury donated about \$25,000 from the annual mayor's gala toward the window restoration project, leaving the museum to fund about \$27,000 by gathering donations.

Mr. McIntyre expects the windows to be re-installed before the 2009 museum season starts this spring.

For more information or to donate, contact the Sharon Temple Museum Society at 905-478-2389 or [www.sharontemple.ca](http://www.sharontemple.ca)