

# Built in Brockville

Accounts of Local Historic Architecture  
by **Doug Grant**

## St. Lawrence Hall

A hotel that was originally the  
**Melinda & David Mair House**

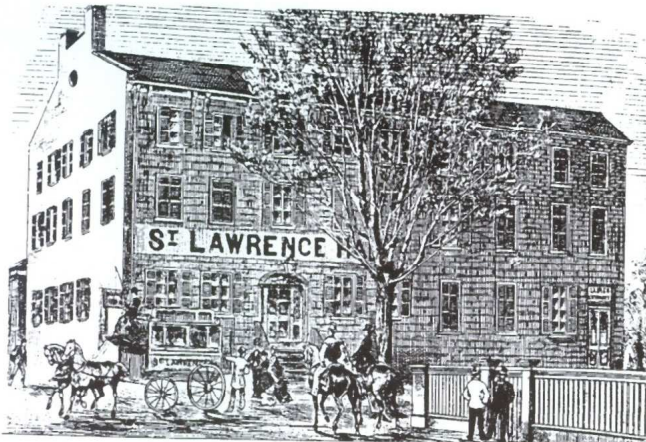
**20-24 Church Street at Buell St.  
Built in 1832, enlarged ca. 1870**



*This is the earliest known photograph of the St. Lawrence Hall as it looked in the 1860s*

This building at Church and Buell Sts. has a long and interesting history. Starting as a two-storey stone house built for Melinda and David Mair in 1832, it evolved into a small hotel. Following the sudden death of his first wife in 1832, David Mair married Julia Prévost, the granddaughter of William Buell Sr., on April 26, 1834. She lived only until December 16, 1847. Mair continued to operate Mair's Hotel until his death in 1850. Ownership then seemed to pass into the hands of Richard S. Wood who held a mortgage on the property.

The St. Lawrence Hall hotel business was established here in 1855. It was leased to various hotel proprietors including H.C.



*Here is an engraving of the hotel that appeared in an 1879 issue of the Canadian Illustrated News*



*The new re-built and enlarged St. Lawrence Hall as it appeared about 1895, following the disastrous fire of 1883.*

Phillips, Thomas Bennett, and Jonas J. Cole in the 1860s. Jonas J. Cole purchased the hotel in 1868 for \$2755, and operated it until his death. The building may have been doubled in size at this point. The earlier pictures show the second section on the right side to the east. Neil McCarney purchased the enlarged hotel from Cole's widow, Emily in 1871 for \$10,000.

The St. Lawrence Hall was purchased by William H. Comstock and John Stagg Jr. in 1873 for \$9000 from Neil McCarney, who signed a 10 year lease to operate a hotel there at \$1500 per year. At that time the hotel consisted of 80 guest rooms, a dining room for 150, a bar, livery stable, and sample rooms for salesmen.

The hotel, while operated by Amos Robinson, was totally destroyed by fire in 1883. It had to be rebuilt by the owners using the remaining stone walls. The new building was much larger and taller, as is seen in the later photographs. It continued to be under the management of Amos Robinson well into the next century.



*William H. Comstock*

It may have been that the St. Lawrence Hall was being over-shadowed by the new Strathcona Hotel on the main street. The owner Mr. Comstock decided, about 1911, that he would renovate this hotel building and convert it to apartments.

The St. Lawrence Hall was closed. Announcements were made in the newspapers that an up-to-date apartment building was in the works, and then surprisingly, the Strathcona Hotel was destroyed by fire on the night of Dec. 27, 1911. The proprietor of the Strathcona, W.H. Brown, persuaded Comstock & Stagg, the owners of this hotel, to open it again for him to run. This was the situation for a few years until the conversion did take place.

The property on Church St. has been known as the Devonshire Apartments for over 75 years. It still stands at the corner of Church & Buell. New owners in the 1990s decided to rename it the St. Lawrence Hall Apartments, but to most older Brockvillians it remains the Devonshire Apartments.

Watch for Doug Grant's "Built in Brockville" series highlighting historic buildings in the May issue. If you would like to contact Doug visit his web-log at [dmgrant.wordpress.com](http://dmgrant.wordpress.com).