

Convocation Hall

Welcome to Osgoode Hall. My name is Elise Brunet. I'm the Curator at the Law Society of Upper Canada and I'll be your guide for this the tour of Convocation Hall, also known as the Great Hall, the Lawyers' Hall or Osgoode Hall Restaurant.

Convocation Hall opened on February 7, 1882. If we could travel back a 125 years, right now you'd likely be sitting at a small individual table, staring at the back of a fellow law student, nervously answering exam questions. Legal education in Ontario was very different in those days. First, the only place where you could study to become a lawyer was Osgoode Hall. There was also no such thing as full time law school. In fact, students spent very little time, if any, attending lectures. Around 1882, a student's training consisted of a mandatory reading list, a few exams, voluntary attendance at lectures (about an hour a day) and several years of apprenticeship with a lawyer. Oh yes, and if you were a woman, well, you wouldn't be here at all. Clara Brett Martin, the first woman lawyer in the British Commonwealth, was admitted as a student in 1893.

Which brings me back to the room. Convocation Hall was built to accommodate the Law Society's examinations and other large gatherings. If the room reminds you of a medieval English castle, you're not that far off. The room is inspired by the great halls of medieval Europe. The halls there served as the public centre of the castle, manor house and other institutions. Universities and the English Inns of Court from which the Law Society's borrowed many of its traditions all had a Great Hall.

Convocation Hall has changed since its construction. The proportions haven't changed but there was a major, let's say ...facelift, in 1938. William Storm, the architect of the Hall and one of the architects of the central part of the building, designed the Hall in the Romanesque style. Think sturdy architecture, rounded arch windows, and colonettes with elaborate capitals, the top part. In 1938 the panelling was replaced by bookcases, the pink granite colonettes were buried in plaster, as were the alternating stone and brick surrounds of the windows. A large stained glass window at the north end of the room (where the large wood carving is) was also lost then.

Let's look at the room. We may as well start at the carving since we're already there. The low relief carving is the seal of the Law Society. The man with the big club is Hercules – he represents the might of the law. The woman on the right is Justitia, the figure of Justice. The beaver on top the column is an emblem of Canada and a symbol of hard work. Finally, the ribbon around the column bears the inscription *Magna Charta Anglia* – the charter from 1215 that defined our rights and freedoms.

Just below the carving is a portrait of William Osgoode. Osgoode Hall was named in his honour. Osgoode was Chief Justice of Upper Canada – Ontario – from 1792 to 1794 and he helped set up the justice system of the province. The other portraits around the room are all of Treasurers, the Presidents, of the Law Society.

The ten stained glass windows were designed and made by Christopher Wallis and sponsored by individuals and organizations associated with the legal profession. They were installed in the late 1980s. The windows represent the heritage of law in Canada. If you're interested, there is a key

explaining the windows below the balcony. Just be nice if someone is having lunch at the table in front of it.

Let's head towards the balcony and I'll tell you about the carvings on the railing. From left to right you have the Coat of arms of Ontario with the inscription "Loyal she began, loyal she remains," the Royal Coat of Arms stating "God and my Right" (I only answer to God) and the Coat of Arms of Canada with the inscription "From sea to sea."

The flambeaux, the big torches on three of the walls of the room, were given to the Law Society in 1969 by the Middle Temple, one of the medieval Inns of Court I mentioned earlier, in London, England. The flambeaux are about 110 years old.

The clock hanging from the ceiling was inspired by the clock outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London. It was presented to the Law Society in 1964 by the Lawyers' Club and the Reading Law Club in thanks for hosting many years of club activity at Osgoode Hall.

Let me leave you with one of our ghost stories. One evening, about 50 years ago, the superintendent of the Law Society was doing his rounds. As he got closer to Convocation Hall, he heard the hubbub of a crowd and he thought that someone had forgotten to tell him about a function. When he entered the room, it was empty. Be as it may, our ghosts seem to be of the cheerful kind and I wouldn't let the fact that the room may be haunted ruin your lunch or the rest of your visit.

The next track takes you back outside to look at our famous fence. If you're ready to leave, you can exit through the door in the long side of the room. The hallway will lead you to the atrium. The exit is on the main floor.