September 13, 2019

To {local candidate for MP}

From Dominion Observatory Sub-Committee of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Ottawa Centre

Subject Giving Priority to the Dominion Observatory in the Upcoming Federal Election

The Dominion Observatory (DO) and its related surroundings are of major historical, heritage and scientific value for Canada most broadly, and for Capital Ward more specifically. We strongly urge you to include in her campaign platform support for enhancing the recognition of and access to this historical treasure.

Following is a succinct listing first of all the very real benefits of enhancing the Dominion Observatory, and then the main tasks that would be involved or enabled.

- Benefits of Enhancing the Dominion Observatory
    - Recognize the site for its important scientific and economic development history
    - Highlight that it is formally and architecturally part of Parliament Hill
    - It can form a major tourist attraction
    - It was the site for important early work by women scientists which can be celebrated[1]
    - The seismic and geomagnetic research played a significant role in the development of Canada's mining industry
    - The time-keeping research was world renowned, and played a key role in surveying the boundaries of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.
    - The prime meridian for Canada was established at the Dominion Observatory location.
        - note that the South Azimuth building (number 4 on the map below) and the prime meridian line connecting this building to the main DO building need to be properly protected and marked (see below)
    - The CBC radio's "the beginning of the long dash" daily 1pm time signal originated here and was maintained until 1970 when atomic clocks took over this role
    - The plaque commemorating Sir Stanford Fleming, who invented Standard Time (time zones) is at the observatory, and the timekeeping at the observatory derives from his work.
    - It is easily reached by Ottawa's new LRT / O-Train
    - It will complement the new Ottawa Hospital
    - There is strong support from both the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) Ottawa Centre and the national RASC
    - The Canadian Institute of Geomatics is supportive, given the DO's seminal role in the early surveying of Canada

[1] Notably Miriam Burland - 1st Woman Astronomer to work at a National Observatory in Canada; Hired by Chief Astronomer Stewart Meldrum in 1929-32 until 1968, after she graduated from Astro Physics at McGill University 1926-28; and Mary Grey - 2nd Woman Astronomer at Dominion Observatory, hired approx. 1948-52 until Astronomy program ended in 1970.

- Main Tasks Involved or Enabled
    - Recognize that the heritage value involves the entire precinct around the main Dominion Observatory building, including several other buildings (see below)
    - Bring together all the various designations on the precinct's site into an overall coherent heritage designation
    - Restore the Dominion Telescope to its original location (now in long terms storage in the warehouse of the Science Museum off St. Laurent Blvd)
    - Restore the meteorite collection formerly on Booth St, now in storage in Gatineau at Canadian Museum of Nature.
    - Coordinate the various federal government agencies involved with shared responsibilities, including Parks Canada, Natural Resources Canada~~,~~ NCC, Heritage Canada, Ingenium (the crown corp for the relevant museums)
    - Liaise with other relevant stakeholders, including Heritage Ottawa, Heritage Ontario, City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Hospital, National Trust for Canada
    - In order to address modern fire codes and handicap access, a new stairwell and elevator would need to be built in a modern complementary structure directly behind and attached to the building. (This could easily be done.)

The Dominion Observatory is both a national and a local treasure. It should become a museum for earth science, not just astronomy. As such, it can house a wide range of artifacts including time-keeping, seismology as well as astronomical measurement instruments and meteorites as well as others from NRCan and Environment Canada. More broadly, not only can it tell the story of the earth as a planet, it could also provide a factual description of the changes to the earth that are occurring (e.g. climate change).

Further background on the DO is available here: https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_fhbro_eng.aspx?id=5695 and https://ingeniumcanada.org/channel/articles/the-dominion-observatorys-earth-physics-and-time-keeping-functions-part-4

PHOTO CREDIT: CSTM Archives

Earth Physics at the Dominion Observatory. The various functions are well illustrated by this 1966 aerial photo. No. 12 is the Geodetic Survey Building, completed in 1914, no. 6 is the Gravity and Standards Testing Building, and no. 11, the Geophysical Laboratory. Today, the Dominion Observatory is a Federal Heritage building which rests on the grounds of the Central-Experimental-Farm National Historic Site of Canada. Buildings 3, 6, and 9 have since been removed.

1966 Aerial Photo of the Dominion Observatory Site

buildings demolished

south azimuth building

meridian line

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