



THE BERMUDA NATIONAL TRUST

To protect and promote Bermuda's unique natural and cultural heritage forever.

The Bermuda National Trust on proposed demolition of Wantley, Princess Street, Hamilton

June 10, 2021

The news that Wantley is being demolished is shocking. This is a building with considerable historic and architectural value, built in the 1870s by Samuel David Robinson, one of the most prominent Black businessmen and community leaders of the time. Samuel and his brother Joseph Henry left a rich legacy in the city, especially in the buildings they developed. Among them are The Emporium on Front Street, the Arcade on Burnaby Street and the eight-townhouse Victoria Terrace on Princess Street.

Samuel Robinson, a proponent of higher education, was one of the founders of the Berkeley Educational Society which was dedicated to providing integrated and improved education for Black and White Bermudians. Holding its first meeting in the drawing room at Wantley, the Society went on to establish the Berkeley Institute in 1897 at Samaritans' Lodge on Court Street.

As recently as April 2013 Wantley was described as "a very fine and virtually unaltered example of Victorian domestic architecture... A remarkable feature is the elaborate wooden verandah which is still in reasonable condition with almost intact decorative wooden railings, brackets and shuttered ends".

Tragically, this building was allowed to deteriorate over the next few years to the point that it is facing demolition in June 2021. The BNT has researched Wantley for its Architectural Heritage book series (City of Hamilton volume) and over the past five years has attempted to become involved in its care.

- In 2008, Wantley was sold by descendants of Samuel Robinson to the Bermuda Housing Corporation (BHC).
(Note: By this time buildings of historic or architectural significance had been identified throughout Bermuda and were given protective listings or "grades". However, City of Hamilton buildings remained unlisted. Had Wantley been listed for protection along the lines of buildings throughout Bermuda, we believe it would have warranted a Grade 1, ie at the top of the scale. Although Wantley is unlisted, its location, Princess Street, is a designated a Historic Area of the City of Hamilton.)
- In 2016, the BNT conducted a detailed feasibility study to determine whether it could protect this building. However, an agreement could not be reached with BHC on a price that would make it possible for the BNT to acquire the property.



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- In 2018 the BNT contacted the BHC to offer help and support as it became clear that this important building was deteriorating. We were advised that renovations were being planned for Wantley, once work on Victoria Terrace was completed.
- On the afternoon of Tuesday June 8, Ms Maxine Esdaille called the BNT, very upset as she witnessed preparations for demolition of the building; we responded immediately, and Conservation Officer Myles Darrell headed to the site, talked to Ms Esdaille and Princess Street neighbours and took photographs. The building was in a serious state of neglect, with no electricity or running water, but still apparently structurally sound, although squatters had been allowed to occupy it and made an appalling mess.

The demolition order on Wantley still stands – but has been paused. Permission to demolish a building is not required to be advertised and it is akin to applying for a Building Permit. A demolition order was granted on the basis that Wantley wasn't listed. However, an application does need to be made because it is located in a designated Historic Area. We can only hope that public scrutiny of this situation will encourage the owners to make every effort to protect this important part of Bermuda's history.