MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 55 King Street

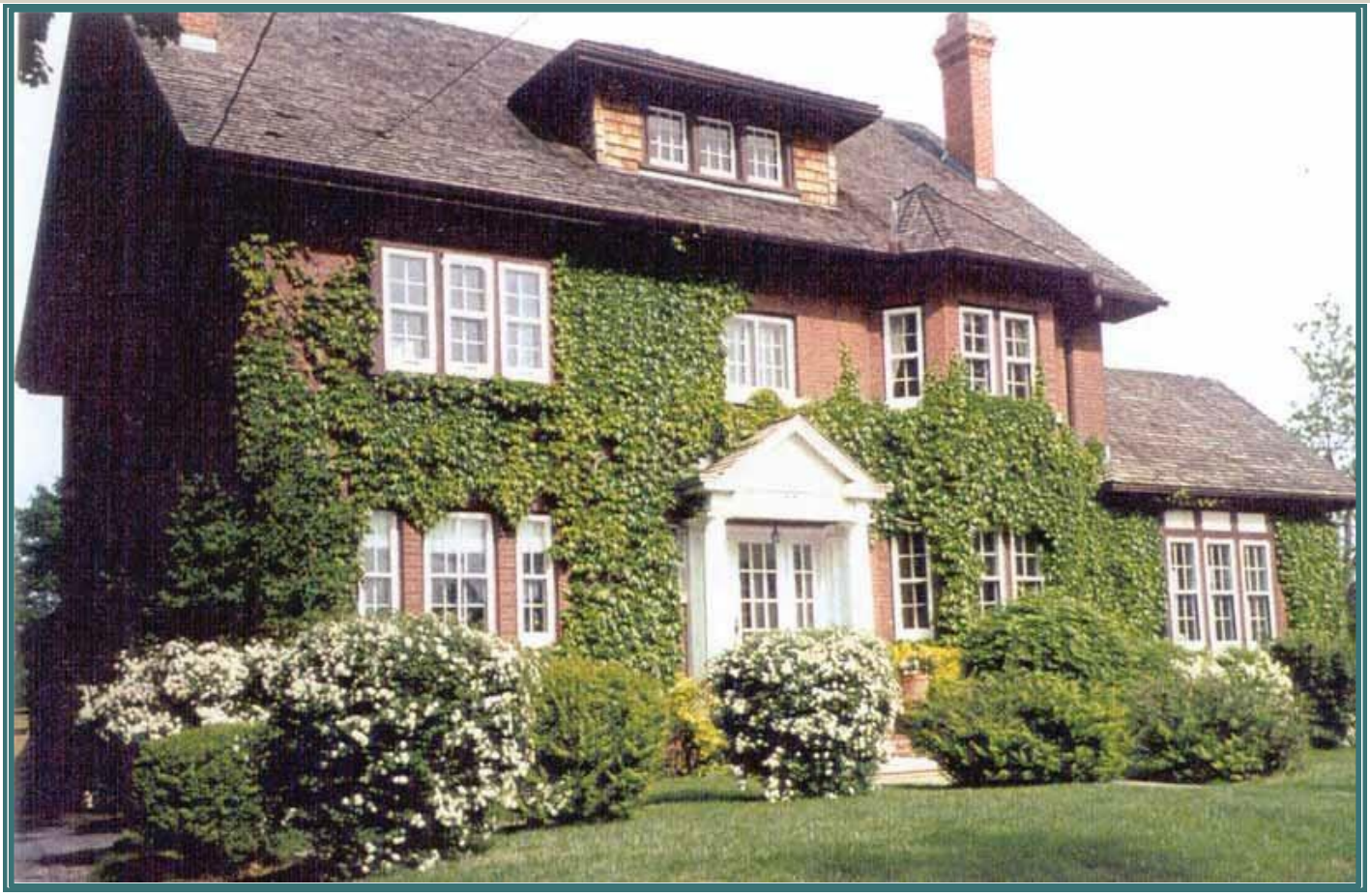
Known as: Charles Wickett House

Architectural Style: Arts and Crafts

Date Built: Circa 1909

Date Designated: November, 27, 2002 to By-Law No. 54/2002, SCHEDULE B-1

Lot Description: BLK 6 LOT 2



Architectural Description

Located on the east side of King Street between two much earlier houses, St. Mark's Rectory and the Clemes Duplex, this house was built between 1909 and 1912 for Charles Hearn Wickett, a prominent dry goods merchant. Circa 1920 the first floor was extended to the south and the back verandah added.

Side gabled, three storeys, triple brick, stretcher bond on a cement foundation important features include an irregular cedar shake roof, gables half timbered on stucco, hooded windows and dormers. The fenestration is the most impressive feature with a total of 47 multi-faceted windows in a variety of groupings.

Except for the neoclassical front entrance and back verandah this house is an interesting Canadian vernacular version of the Arts and Crafts style of architecture.

The house completed for Wickett in 1912 was three storey, symmetrical plan with a large hall, three reception rooms, a large kitchen and butler's pantry on the main floor, four bedrooms plus a sewing room and bathroom on the second, and another three bedrooms and bathroom on the third. In 1912, the living room was enlarged by extending the main floor at the front to the south. In the space created behind the extension a two-sided verandah was added. It is very doubtful that the front entrance is original. It was likely modified to have the classical features of the new verandah.

Except for two exterior anomalies, 55 King Street remains to this day a beautifully preserved Canadian vernacular version of the Arts and Crafts style which was very much in vogue among the moneyed middle class in England between 1880 and 1925. In rejecting classical ornamentation architects were paying tribute to the simple elements and fine workmanship of Mediaeval and Tudor craftsmen. The movement did not find favour in Port Hope, making 55 King Street a rare manifestation in the Town of the Arts and Craft style.

The main entrance and the rear verandah are two anomalies. The entrance has a classical pediment and both have neoclassical fluted pillars and pilasters. Although the front door has sidelights it has no transom light. As there is not sufficient space it suggests that the original design called for a typical hooded entrance. Perhaps Wickett believed a concealed doorway too avant-garde and wanted his house to have the classical entrance of other fine Port Hope houses, particularly the Bluestone three doors away. Furthermore, the doors with their many lights are atypical but are in keeping with the fenestration on the rest of the house.

The house has a cement foundation, is three storeys side gabled finished in triple brick, stretcher bond, with Tudor half timbering on stucco.

The roof is irregular, steeply pitched finished in Cedar Shakes (reminiscent of thatch). The front slope is broken by a hopped hood over the south bay. A three window hooded dormer and two high chimneys with pots at the gable ends. The rear slope is broken by a two window hooded dormer.

The second storey is basically rectangular. The bay of the first storey bay continues to the

second with a matching set of four windows. A railed balcony at the rear extends over the verandah.

The first storey is L-shaped. The side-gabled extension to the south is half-timbered on stucco with similar detailing above the windows. The extension encloses the south end of an exceptionally long beautifully proportioned living room. The fireplace is on the east wall below the south chimney. Behind the extension is the classical porch, mentioned above. On the rear elevation towards the north end there is a slight jut. Beyond it is a small enclosed back porch with a hopped roof.

The most striking feature of the house is the number, beauty and variety of its windows. There are twenty-four window bays. All have stone sills and brick lintels in soldier courses. In the twenty-four bays are two groups of four windows each, eight groups of three, three groups of two, and nine single windows making a grand total of forty-seven not including cellar windows. All are multi- faceted, some are six over six and others four over four. In addition the rear elevation has two projecting bays of three windows each with overhanging hoods, one of which is at the level of the interior stair landing.

Interior:

The wood used is chiefly maple with some pine and cherry. Between the rooms on the main floor are five double French doors. Once black, the paint has now been removed and they appear to be cherry.

The impressive main staircase is maple and rises from the front hall to the third floor. Of simple unembellished design it has two large windowed landings. An enclosed back stairway leads from the butler's pantry to the second floor.

Early in the century it was unusual to have more than one bathroom in a house of this size. A second toilet in the cellar and a washbasin in the bedroom was deemed sufficient for servants. This house has a full bathroom on the third floor complete with the original fixtures. The present owners have added a washroom on the main floor.

There are three fireplaces, all with different chimney pieces. When the house was extended the fireplace in the living room was moved from the south wall to the east wall. The original simple stone face was retained and the chimney piece of a restrained classical design may also be original. In the bedroom above the living room the chimney piece appears to be original. It has a simple brick tile face and mantel.

The den fireplace has an exceptionally ornate Greek Revival chimney piece. Because brick tiles similar to those used in the bedroom are stored in the cellar, the present owners suspect that the original face was removed, tiles introduced and the exceptionally ornate Greek Revival chimney-piece from an earlier house installed.

Historical Abstract

Originally part of the Smith estate a large parcel fronting on King Street between St. Mark's Church and J.M. Andrews lot at the corner of Dorset Street had been for over 20 years in the possession of the Collector of Customs, a wealthy and highly regarded citizen, Marcus Fayette Whitehead. In an area

of over two acres the map shows only two buildings, one very large with several wings, the other so small it may have been a shed. It is known that at one time there was a large frame house dating from the 1840's somewhere on what later became Lot 6. Known as Honeymoon or Woodbine Cottage it was moved to 4-6 King Street, then greatly altered and enlarged.

Twenty-five years later the area bordered by William Street on the north, Hope Street on the East, the Baseline Road (Dorset Street) on the south, and King Street on the west had been divided into Blocks, 6,7,8 and 9 with Block 6 being three times as large as the other three combined. Blocks 7,8 and 9, all of which lay north of St. Mark's, had a combined total of 22 lots while the largest, Block 6, lying south of St. Mark's had only five. The smallest at the corner of Dorset (owned by Andrews in 1853) bacame the site of R. Charles Smith's house (61 King Street) but the rest of the block fronting on King Street belonged to the Whitehead family.

By 1875, Marcus Fayette Whitehead had died at 80 and a lot on the north, next to the Church, had been sold to J. Clarke and a lot on the south, next to the Smith House, to Charles Clemes. In 1876, Cleme's daughter married Fred Whitehead, Secretary of The Midland Railway and, like his father, a man of importance in the community. Over the next few years several conveyances between family members were executed. Whether or not there was ever a house on the acre, now No. 55, is unclear. As there is little space for a garden to the south of the Clemes House it is likely that the garden and lawn were on the north. It would be unusual for a house of its size not to have such an adjunct. There was, until recently, evidence of an orchard having been at the rear of the lot.

James Whitehead died in 1906, and by 1909, Charles Hearn Wickett (1874-1942) had bought the lot. Wickett was a successful dry goods merchant, whose store was on the northeast corner of Walton and Ontario Streets (now Watson's Drugs). At the time he was living in a smaller house further north on King Street. He immediately began building but ran into financial reverses and, as a result, the house was not completed until 1912. Approximately eight years later, in the thriving post-war period following the Great War he extended the first floor to the south and added a verandah in the back.

Fifty-five King Street remained in the Wickett family until 1965 when it was sold by the estate of Charles Wickett's widow, Edith Mary Hume. It is interesting to note that the house at No. 22 King, built circa 1910 for Mrs. Wickett's brother, Jack Hume, has a similar layout but the individual features are quite different.

