MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 34-36 Walton Street

Known as: E.P. Smith Block

Architectural Style: Walton Street Heritage District

Date Built: Circa 1850

Date Designated: November 3, 1980 to By-Law No. 41/80, SCHEDULE B-1

Lot Description: STEWART P PT TOWN PLOT 72



Architectural Description

This property, referred to as the Smith Block, is being designated for historical and architectural reasons as being an important component of the Walton streetscape. In 1850, Elias Peter Smith commissioned Mr. Austin, an architect from Rochester, New York to design a new commercial block to be built on the subject property. Mr. Austin had previously designed Port Hope's Town Hall.

The Smith Block is a brick commercial block with three storeys in five units. It is a typical nineteenth century design with brick pilasters capped with wood. The early decorative treatment of contrasting pilasters and cornice in cream and recessed panels in red may reflect the original brickwork or the preferred early treatment. This survives in the west section of the facade.

This Block survived in Port Hope until 1980 when a disastrous fire gutted the inside. The original facade remains standing and a new building using the original three-storey restored facade is presently being completed.

Historical Abstract

The E.P. Smith Block, a three-story commercial block, is located on Crown land first granted to Elias Smith and Jonathan Walton, original settlers of Port Hope in 1797. In 1815, the two men further divided the land with Elias Smith receiving most of the downtown area of present day Port Hope. Through a series of transactions between members of the Smith Family, in 1844, Elias Peter Smith, the grandson of Elias Smith, purchased the site on which 34-46 Walton Street is located. In the same year, the Smith Block was erected on this main street site. The North American Hotel, next door to the east was also erected in the same year. A disastrous fire in the spring of 1850 burnt this first structure and its neighbour to the ground. Not to be discouraged, Elias wasted no time in erecting a new, three-story commercial block in the current style with a simple and well-proportioned pilastered façade designed by Rochester architect, Merwin Austin. Austin also designed the Town Hall in 1851, the Smith Block in 1850 and St. Lawrence Hotel in 1853.

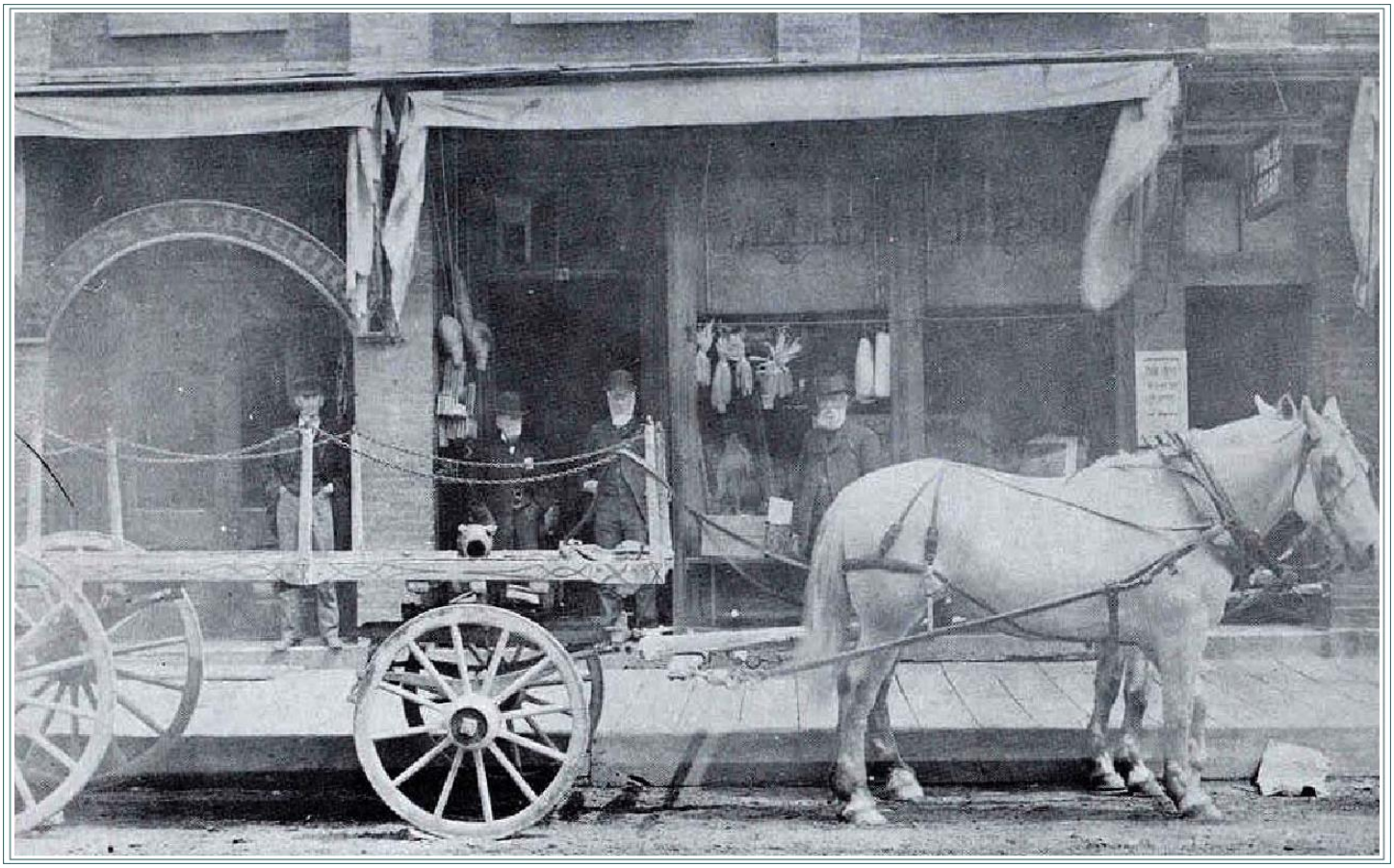
During its lifetime, this block has housed the typical businesses of the times: a bookstore; confectionery shop; a boot and shoe shop; small general stores; a news dealer who sold the various rags of the times; and the Mechanics Institute was also located in the block for a short period.

The facade of the building went through a series of renovations with the greater part of the changes taking place on the ground floor level, as the shop fronts evolved with the times. In the easternmost section, the old rectangular double hung sash type bays were knocked out to be replaced by two horizontal sliding windows. This unfortunate 'improvement' was carried out to enhance the upper floor displays of the hardware store below.

In 1980, shortly after a destructive flood, the building caught fire. The entire building was gutted and its future looked bleak. After a series of negotiations between the owner of the block, Gary Russell, L.A.C.A.C., the A.C.O., Bill Wyatt, the mayor of the town, and Peter J. Stokes, a consulting restoration architect, it was finally agreed to save the facade with the A.C.O. pledging financial assistance to enable

the owner to cover the construction costs of the restoration and rebuilding. The front façade was then anchored and restored accompanied by the construction of an entirely new building behind the preserved facade.

Archival Photo



William Simpson and William Read had a store selling wine and liquor, crockery and glassware in the E.P. Smith Block. The Public Library was located here briefly. In 1881, William Simpson resided at the John Read House (20 King Street) with his wife, Mary Jane Read Simpson and father-in-law, John.