MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 162 Peter Street

Known as: John Helm Jr. House (Belgrave)

Architectural Style: Italianate

Date Built: Circa 1866

Date Designated: November 3, 1980 to By-Law No. 41/80, SCHEDULE B-6

Lot Description: CON BF PT LOT 3



Architectural Description

This two-storey house is indicative of the Italianate Style Victorian house. A symmetrically placed entrance is noted for its heavily decorated portico topped by iron balustrade made in the foundry of the original owner. The entrance is flanked by two bay windows with similar iron topping. The roof overhangs are supported by brackets typical of this Italianate period and is topped by a widow's walk. The semi-circular window over the entrance designed in a Florentine pattern is of particular interest.

The main house is a two-storey brick building of Italianate style. This building has been moderated somewhat since it was originally built. The facade contains a number of significant architectural features. The lower floor consists of the entranceway and two front bay windows. The iron foundry owned by Mr. Helm provided the cast iron balustrades over the front entrance and in fact all the great amount of cast iron work over the two front bay windows as well as the widow's walk. There is a good example of a semi-elliptical window over the front entrance. It is of the Florentine pattern. Another interesting point is the unusual width of the overhanging eaves with their double brackets.

Historical Abstract

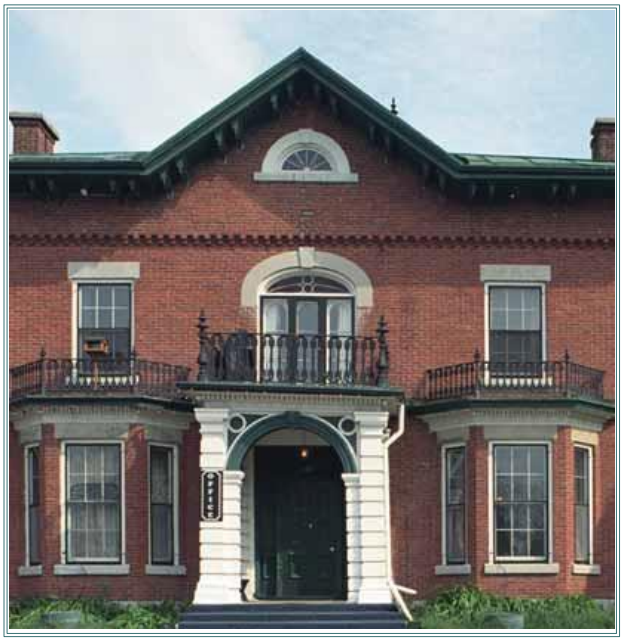
John Helm Jr. (1816-1912) was a prominent local businessman who established a foundry and machine shop on Mill Street in 1849, capable of making steam engines, boilers, threshing machines, and reaping machines. The foundry was later located at Queen and Peter Streets powered by Helm's Dam on the Ganaraska River. He learned the trade from his father, John Helm Sr. at his father's foundry on College Street in Cobourg.

John Helm acquired approximately thirty acres of land including property purchased from George Gladman in 1856 on a neighbouring lot (180 Dorset Street East) in order to build his estate. He constructed his house, Belgrave, in 1866.

He later added the unique water tower in 1877 housing an elaborate water system. The tower concealed a large storage tank capable of pumping and storing a large quantity of lake water. A five thousand gallon wooden pressure vessel rested on the fourth level of this tower. Originally, its purpose was to supply the house and surrounding acreage with water. Five acres were irrigated by an underground piping system used to water the lawns and gardens. But in the event of a fire, there was a readily available source of water. In addition to the header system, a storage tank was built over the attic of the mansion. Whenever the tower water level went down, a cantilever device automatically switched over to the attic tank.

In 1872, the Town recognized the need for a municipal waterworks that could supply water by use of rotary pump using local water power supplied through a series of underground pipes to assist in fire fighting. John Helm offered to install the system and completed the work in 1875. A water works building was built adjacent to Helm's Dam containing rotary pumps and turbines. The new waterworks system greatly enhanced fire-fighting efforts in the town.

Belgrave, the Helm estate, remained in the Helm family until 1920. The Belgrave Tower and two of the Interior Rooms are designated under separate designations.



Architectural Detail

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