MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 162 Peter Street

Known as: John Helm Jr. House (Belgrave) Water Tower

Architectural Style: Italianate

Date Built: Circa 1877

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

Lot Description: CON BF PT LOT 3



Architectural Description

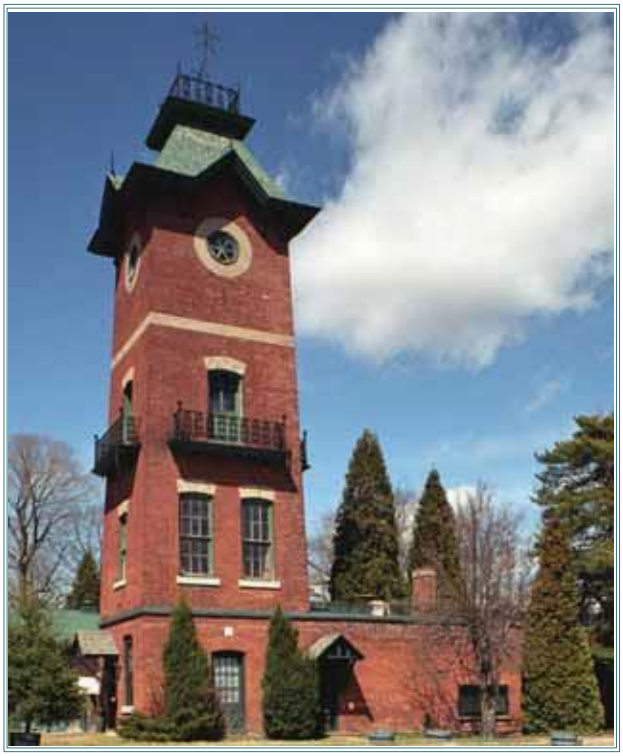
The equipment once used for the system, most of which had been imported from England, has disappeared - old steam engine pump and all. The water tower is four storeys high made entirely of original bricks kilned on the estate property. The first three levels have large rectangular windows. Some windows are fenced in by elaborate wrought iron balustrades, which came from the nearby iron foundry owned by Mr. Helm. The uppermost level of the tower has circular spoked windows set back within decorative light coloured brickwork. The glass windowpanes themselves (some still original) are also said to have been made on the property. For a finishing touch of English grace, the tower is crowned with a green gabled roof with a widow's walk. Inside the tower, there is a wooden spiral staircase, which winds its way up to the fourth level. The well beneath the tower, which is brick lined all the way down, was some seventy-five feet deep and about ten feet in diameter.

Historical Abstract

John Helm Jr. (1816-1912) built the water tower in 1877 as part of his thirty-acre estate called Belgrave. 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.

John Helm Jr. 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.

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.



Architectural Detail

Upper windows are fenced in by elaborate wrought iron balustrades, which came from the nearby iron foundry owned by Mr. Helm. The uppermost level of the tower has circular spoked windows inset within decorative light coloured brickwork. The glass windowpanes themselves (some still original) are also said to have been made on the property.