MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 61 King Street

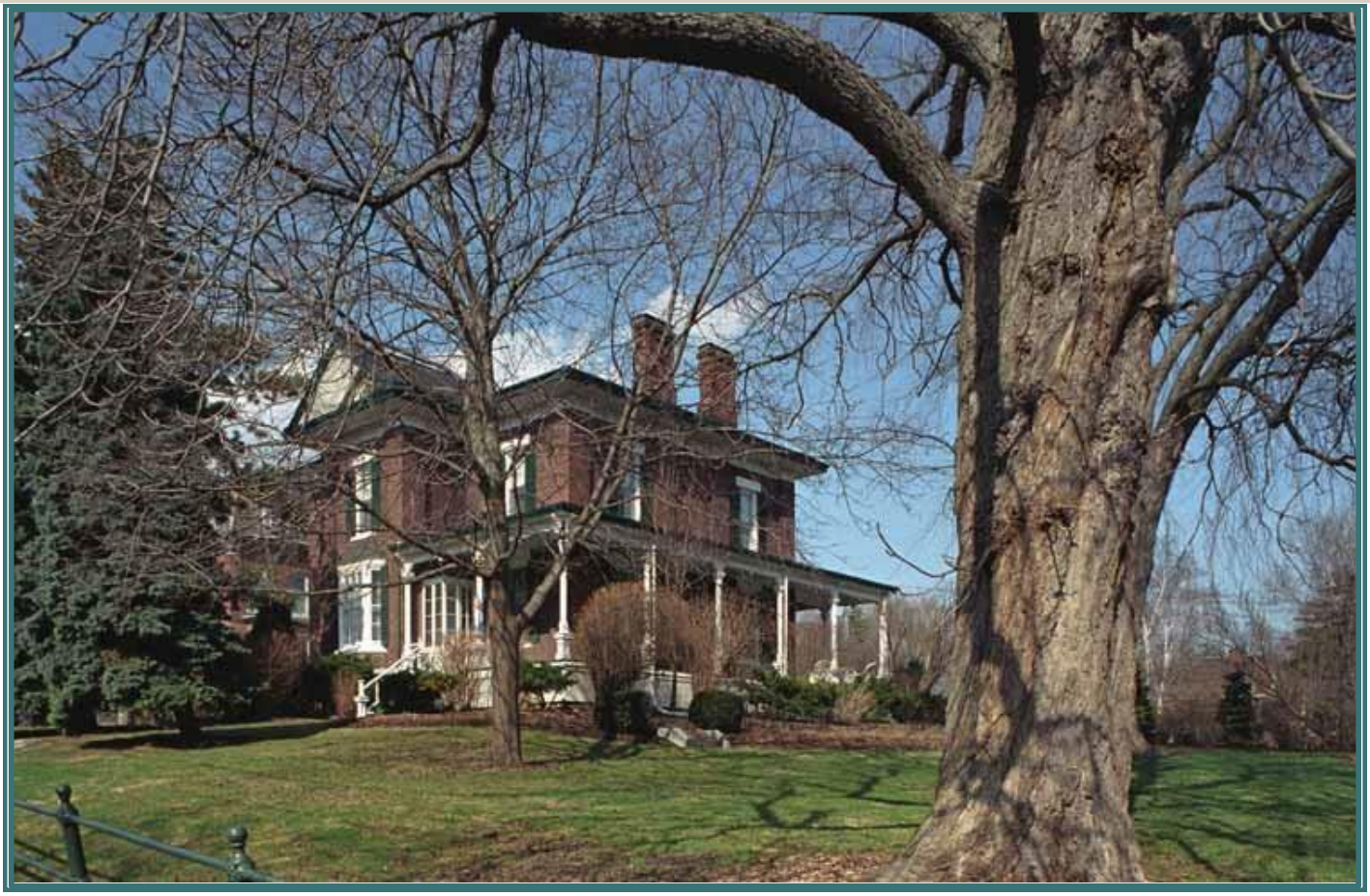
Known as: R . Charles Smith House

Architectural Style: Regency

Date Built: Circa 1858

Date Designated: November 3, 1980 to By-Law No. 41/80, SCHEDULE B-5

Lot Description: PT 6



Architectural Description

The building measures approximately sixty-eight feet by forty-three feet. The house is basically a hip roof Regency Villa with a central hall plan. The main west facade is relieved by a central projection with a pedimental gable, and pilasters, articulating the south wall and each corner, enhance the mass and solidity of the structure. Decorative projecting header bricks under the wide eaves resemble dentils. The two tall brick chimneys on each side of the house are also ornamented with brick dentils and with recessed panels. An elaborate cast iron cresting surmounting the hipped roof further enlivens the skyline. On the north wall, the cornice of a projecting alcove is decorated with ornamental carved brackets. A verandah spans the south side of the house and has eight-sided posts resting on panelled square bases, and carved details below the roof line. A notable feature of the main facade, and a characteristic of the Regency-Gothic style, is the four-centre ogival arches fanlight with fine gothic tracery, which sits in the pediment of the frontispiece. The exterior entranceway on the projecting frontispiece is occupied by a large single leaf panelled door with moulded trim, and within the vestibule (and directly below the ogival fanlight) is the principal doorway consisting of panelled double doors with single etched glass panes in each. Surmounting the doors is a two-pane transom, which rises to a four-centre point. Moulded trim surrounds the door and transom.

The south walls have seven six over six double-hung sash, and one entranceway on the rear extension. On the main (west) facade are five six over six double hung sash, the main entrance, the ogival fanlight, and a bay window in the frontispiece consisting of one six over six, and two two over two double hung sash. On the north walls are five six over six double-hung sash, and the projecting alcove with two one over one double hung sash in the centre and one two over two double-hung sash on each side.

At the rear (east) of the house is a rectangular brick shed with a gable roof, and a gable peak on the side facing south, and decorative brick dentils.

Interior:

The ground floor ceilings of the house are decorated with cornice mouldings, especially deep in the dining room, which also contains a moulded plaster ceiling medallion. The cornice of the alcove projecting from the northwest parlour is embellished with ornate foliate plaster brackets. The interior doors have five panels and moulded trim. Between the dining room and the parlour is a set of folding doors consisting of four leaves. The two outer leaves are panelled, and attached to each of these is a twenty-one pane door. The parlour and the living room each contain a fireplace with attractive cast iron coal grates and moulded marble mantelpieces. The oak staircase in the front hall has turned balusters and newel post, and the rail ends in a comma shape over the newel. A carved design decorates the sides of the steps. The ground floor and a few second storey rooms have hardwood floors, and the remaining bedrooms are floored with wide pine planks. The kitchen and pantry are decorated with three foot high wainscoting. Three of the doors opening into these rooms have six panels each, and the ceiling in the kitchen is composed of a decorative metal.

The grounds, which have a frontage of 184 feet along King Street and 301 feet along Dorset Street, are lined on the south and west sides with an iron fence, which was presumably cast in the Helm Foundry.

Historical Abstract

Robert Charles Smith (1817-1886) built this impressive brick house for himself and his wife Sara in 1858. The house stands across the street from his father's house (John David Smith), the Bluestone (21 Dorset Street East). In 1851, R. Charles Smith contributed to the building boom that occurred during the early 1850's by building a commercial block on Walton Street (48-60 Walton Street). Not only was he successful in establishing real estate holdings, he also established himself as a lumber dealer.

In 1884, the house was sold to John Henry Helm (1845-1918) who was born in Cobourg in 1845. His father, known as 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 Street powered by Helm's Dam on the Ganaraska River.

J. Henry's occupation was as a machinist. By 1880, he was in partnership with Robert Nicholls doing business as Helm & Nicholls as machinists. J. Henry Helm was Treasurer of the Benevolent Society for over twenty years after its establishment by William Craig in 1862.

His family lived in Belgrave (162 Peter Street) now Greenwood Tower, which was built for them in 1866. The R. Charles Smith House is best remembered as the Helm House since the John Henry Helm family and their descendants resided there from 1884 to 1968.

The two-storey brick house is L-shaped in plan. Originally the structure was rectangular, but the Helms added the rear section in 1885. The house is positioned on its corner lot to take full advantage of a western view of the town and a southern view provided by the three-sided verandah.

Archival Photo



The house as it appeared at the turn of the century circa 1901.