MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 17 Mill Street North

Known as: Registry Office

Architectural Style: Neo-Classic

Date Built: Circa 1871

Date Designated: January 20, 1992 to By-Law No. 05/92, SCHEDULE B-1

Lot Description: PT 20



Architectural Description

The Land Registry Office is an attractive brick building, simple in its single storey silhouette and gable roof of medium pitch. The gable end, which forms a triangular pediment, faces the street and presents a three bay facade with projecting vestibule. All the door and window openings are crowned with true semi-circular arches (vaguely Italianate in inspiration).

On the facade these are recessed into arched brick panels and topped with conspicuous keystones. Band courses in brick and a plinth add decorative emphasis to the masonry. Still visible and of significance is the painted sign over the front door that reads "East Durham 1871 ".

But more than architectural detail is important to the designation of the registry office. The structure itself is unique, composed of three brick vaults that run across the width of the building. This relates to the building's prime objective, fireproofing, essential to its role as a safe depository for all legal documents affecting land ownership. It follows a plan established by the provincial government in the 1870's.

Several similar offices were built in other Ontario towns. Of those that remain, Port Hope's stands fairly well preserved, although some other fireproofing features such as iron doors and shutters, and slate roofing have been lost.

Historical Abstract

In 1870, the Corporation of Northumberland Durham purchased the land on which the building is located, and the following year the Registry Office, formally housed in the Customs House (12 Mill Street South), was built. Port Hope, now part of Northumberland County, was originally part of Durham County in the 19th century.

In 1792, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe proclaimed the official creation of nineteen counties for governmental representation purposes. Northumberland and Durham were referred to as the United Counties. The town line between Hope and Hamilton Townships divided the two counties whose boundaries consisted of Lake Ontario in the south, Hasting County in the east, Ontario County in the west and Peterborough and Victoria Counties in the north. Durham County consisted of the Townships of Cartwright, Manvers, Cavan, Darlington, Clarke and Hope. Northumberland County consisted of the Townships of South Monaghan, Hamilton, Haldimand, Alnwick, Percy, Cramahe, Seymour, Brighton and Murray.

For over a century, the building was used as the land registry office for East Durham County that included Port Hope and Hope Township plus the townships of Manvers, Cavan and South Monaghan. The sign over the front door that reads "East Durham 1871" commemorates the building’s former function.

The building was designed by architect Kivas Tully (1820-1905) during his tenure as senior architect and engineer of the Ontario Public Works Department. From 1868 until his retirement in 1896, Tully oversaw the design, construction and alteration of many provincial public buildings. Other local work completed by Kivas Tully included the design of St. Peter's

Church in Cobourg, and alterations made to St. Mark's Church (51 King Street) in Port Hope including the addition of a transept both completed in 1851.

The building is notable for its architectural merit as an excellent example of the County Registry Office post-Confederation prototype.

It is typical in its general form, which is neoclassical in inspiration. The formal pedimented front of the white brick building includes round-headed windows set in arcading between pilasters. Cast iron labels and sills are used in the windows. As a depository of important legal county documents, typical fireproofing features included iron doors, shutters, a slate roof finish, and interior spaces with barrel-vaulted ceilings. The barrel-vaulted entranceway is thought to be a later addition.

After the amalgamation of land record offices in 1992, the Port Hope Registry Office was closed and records were transferred to new offices in Cobourg. The Town of Port Hope purchased the building and leased it to the recently formed Ganaraska Region Archives.



Architectural Detail

The barrel-vaulted entranceway is thought to be a later addition.