MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 48-60 Walton Street

Known as: Robert Charles Smith Block

Architectural Style: Walton Street Heritage District

Date Built: Circa 1867

Lot Description: PT PLOTS 71 TO 72

48-50 Walton Street

Date Designated: December 6, 1982 to By-Law No. 03/82-83, SCHEDULE B-3

52, 54, 56-60 Walton Street

Date Designated: October 23, 1989 to By-Law No. 91/89, Schedule B-4, B-5, B-6



Architectural Description

This block is a three storey, brick building with a shed roof sloping back from the street It is presently use for retail, office, and residential space.

Twelve bays are found in each of the two upper storeys of the facade, most of which have semi-elliptical structural openings, with corresponding cast iron segmental labels. The two exceptions are found on the second storey of the block and are described as relatively elongated semi-circular decorative windows, both with the cast iron segmental labels noted above. It should be pointed out that the location of these windows in the facade is somewhat unusual as we find, from west to east, four of the semi-elliptical shorter bays, one of the longer semi-circular bays, four of the shorter, one of the longer, and again, two of the shorter. This arrangement, while perhaps unsettling, nevertheless had a purpose. The stairwells, which provided access to the upper floors, were located behind the two long windows, thereby sectioning the block into two sections each with two short bays, the long bay in the centre, and then two short bays. The small section in the westernmost end is a rather odd addition and has its own upstairs entry.

Along the roof line of the main facade we find an ornamental brick cornice known as a machicolated or bracketed cornice, featuring two heavy anchoring brackets at either end of the block; two courses of dentilling; and alternate short/long bracketing throughout. There is an ornamental shop front cornice in the familiar angled brick pattern, known as dogtoothing, framed by a raised brick course on top and bottom.

Also worthy of note is the cast iron support located in the centre section of the block, and also the similar support located in the corner of the window in the westernmost section of the block. These supports are very similar to those found in the block located on the north-east corner of Walton and Ontario Streets, and are probably the original corner supports for a shop front wall.

In summary, this block stands out as an example of a new period in Walton Street development, away from the simple, vertical features of the pilastered facade, towards the more ornate surface patterning of the facade, featuring cast iron lintels, a highly decorative cornice, decorative structural openings, and finally, polychromatic brick work.

Historical Abstract

The original building on this site was built by Robert Charles Smith in 1851. R. Charles Smith was the son of John David Smith, and owner of the Smith family lumber interests. In 1858, he built himself an impressive brick house at King and Dorset Street (61 King Street) across from the Bluestone (21 Dorset Street East).

Built during a period of prosperity in Port Hope, the Robert Charles Smith Block was one of the contributions to the building boom that occurred during the 1850's. Shortly after its erection, the empty third floor of the block was used as the banquet hall for the festivities taking place after the laying of the cornerstone of Port Hope's Town Hall (56 Queen Street).

The Port Hope Watchman of Friday, September. 12, 1851, comments:

"At 5 p.m. upwards of 100 persons sat down to a rich and sumptuous dinner, provided by that justly celebrated caterer of the good things of this life, Mr. T.W. Hastings, the worthy and well known host of the North American Hotel, in this town. In consequence of no room being large enough in the hotel to comfortably accommodate such a large number of guests expected to attend, the entire upper storey of the new buildings belonging to Chas. Smith Esq., was handsomely allowed by him to be used as the Banquet hall, and which was well and tastefully fitted up for the occasion, by Mr. Hastings and assistants. "

When first opened for business, the building was occupied by Perry and Thatcher's Book Store in the centre of the block; H.V. Sanders, a fancy and staple dry goods merchant; Henry Gray, a barber; Robert Orr, another dry goods merchant; and William Hooey, a grocer.

In 1867, the original building on this site, and the Brogdin Building directly to the west, were both burnt to the ground by a disastrous fire. When rebuilt, the block exhibited a marked break from the architectural tradition of the main street, displaying the more ornate patterned surfacing popular in the 1860's. Some of its modern features were cast iron lintels, decorative windows and other details noted in the architectural description above. From 1901 to the present, various enterprises including barbers, book dealers, clothing shops, and even a liquor store have been located in this block.