MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 115 Dorset Street West

Known as: Thomas Clarke House (The Cone)

Architectural Style: Carpenter Gothic

Date Built: circa 1858 (modified 1875 and 1900)

Date Designated: March 19, 1984 to By-Law No. 26/84, SCHEDULE B-1

Lot Description: LOT 454 TO 457



Architectural Description

The one and a half storey grey board and batten house incorporates some elements of the Gothic Revival style which became popular in this province in the mid-eighteenth century. The Cone closely resembles the H.H. Boody house in Brunswick, Maine of 1848-49 by Gervase Wheeler, which A.J. Downing illustrated and discussed in his pattern book, The Architecture of Country Houses, New York 1850. (Ralph Greenhill, Ontario Towns)

Typical characteristics of the Gothic Revival style are the steeply pitched gables, the appearance of irregularity because of complex roof patterns, the pointed arched openings such as the gothic window above the doorway, and decorative details including the quatrefoil window tracery in this same window, the bargeboards in the gable peaks and the finial. A notable feature of the exterior, the board and batten, was preferred by Downing for he believed that it was more economical than clapboard, and because it was a bolder method of construction, it better expressed the picturesque beauty essentially belonging to wooden houses. (Ontario Towns)

Two of the three brick chimneys consist of diagonally placed sections on square bases. The foundation material is coursed rubble. The east wing containing the drawing room and two upstairs bedrooms was added in 1875 by the owner at the time, Mr. James Guest Williams, and in 1900, Dr. Sowers of Washington, D.C. added the verandah and the servants' quarters at the west end.

The main facade has three pairs of four over four double-hung sashes, a bay projection containing three casement windows, and five six over six double-hung sashes. The central double doors each have twelve windowpanes.

The gothic pointed arched opening with casement sash and quatrefoil tracery occupies a dominant position above the central doorway. The rear facade has a bay window extending the full height of the house with four casement sashes on each storey. The fenestration on the south side of the kitchen is modern. The large verandah at the rear of the house provides a view of the lake. A balcony from the second floor bedroom has a carved treillage decoration. Simple cornice mouldings are found in the rooms of the older section of the house including the front hallway, the dining room and the south sitting room. Moulded ceiling medallions ornament the sitting room and the front hallway. More elaborate, deep plaster cornice mouldings and a ceiling medallion decorate the drawing room.

The staircase in the front hall has an eight-sided newel. A simpler balustrade leads from the kitchen to the second floor. In the central hall a glazed double casement sash punctuates the wall behind the staircase. The ground floor has three fireplaces. In the drawing room, the fireplace consists of an iron coal grate and moulded marble-like mantelpiece. The dining room contains a brick fireplace with a simply carved wooden mantelpiece, and in the south sitting room there is a brick and moulded terra cotta fireplace with a simple wooden mantelpiece. Hardwood floors cover much of the ground storey.

An archway with a panelled case leads from the second floor central hall to the west section of the house. The master bedroom has a

simply carved wooden mantelpiece in keeping with the other mantelpieces in the older section of the house, and has French doors opening to the small balcony. The south bedroom in the east wing has a wooden window seat in the bay window. The interior doors are vertically panelled with moulded surrounds.

Historical Abstract

The original owner, Thomas Curtis Clarke (1827-1901) was associate engineer and secretary of the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway, and later advisor for the Harbour Board at the reconstruction of the harbour in the 1850's. His wife Susan Harriet Smith (1837-1909) was a daughter of John David Smith (1786-1849) who built the Bluestone (21 Dorset Street East), and granddaughter of Port Hope founder, Elias Smith.

Later in the century, Thomas C. Clarke became one of North America's great bridge builders (in commemoration of whom there is an Ontario historical plaque on the east side of Lent Lane) pioneering the modern iron viaduct and building massive railway bridges that brought him international acclaim. He was also a partner in a local firm along with Ralph Jones and Edward Haycock that constructed the East and West Blocks of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa in the 1860's.

The house was constructed of board and batten in two stages. In 1858, the first stage began from plans inspired by Andrew Jackson Downing's book, The Architecture of Country Houses (1850). By 1875, local gentleman and philanthropist, Mr. James Guest Williams, had purchased the house and added the east wing containing the drawing room and two upstairs bedrooms. In 1900, Dr. Sowers of Washington, D.C. had purchased the house to be used as a summer home, and he added the large verandah overlooking the lake and the servants' quarters at the west end of the house.

In 1921, the house was sold to Mr. Thurber, who came to take over the Nicholson file Company. Mr. Thurber laid out the terrace and gardens. He added a greenhouse on the southwest corner that was later rebuilt into a sunroom. He died in 1939, and his widow continued to live there until 1968.

