MUNICIPALITY OF PORT HOPE

HERITAGE DESIGNATION

Address: 89 Dorset Street West

Known as: William Sisson House (Wimbourne)

Architectural Style: Regency

Date Built: Circa 1853

Date Designated: April 21, 1986 to By-Law No. 28/86, SCHEDULE B-3

Lot Description: STEWART PLAN PT TOWN LOT 45, PT LOT 46



Architectural Description

This whimsical Regency house was owned for many years by William Sisson, a businessman who played a very important role in the development of Port Hope. The well-balanced square house exhibits features of the Regency style, which was popular until the 1840's. Note the large front verandah and the basic simplicity of the entire building. It does have a peculiar roof - a variation of the truncated hipped roof with a medium pitch. On each side there is a centre-hipped gable. Note also the attractive bargeboard. A ll the basement windows of the house a re covered by ornamental iron grillwork. We have been told by a number of local residents that this was manufactured in a foundry at Port Britain.

The 1853 Wall and Forrest map shows that the roof was originally crested with an ornamental iron railing around the square surface at its centre. The Belden Atlas of 1878 shows the same thing. During the 1920's four additional dormers were added to the second storey to give more light to the bedrooms. Although their function cannot be disputed, their addition was a most unsympathetic arrange-ment architecturally and their removal in the late 1970's restored the house to its original appearance.

The main front door, and the interior ceiling mouldings, floor trim, and doorjambs, as well as the detailing of an existing fireplace were measured by Ferdinand Wagner in 1965 and drawn to scale. These measured drawings are part of the Horwood Collection in the Archives of Ontario in Toronto.

Historical Abstract

William Sisson (1801-1885) born in Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, New York built Wimbourne House. He emigrated to Port Hope in June 1823. His wife, Elisa Ann Walton, was born in Upper Canada in 1805.

The brief biographical account of Mr. Sisson in the Belden Atlas states that "he commenced the manufacture of leather and carried on a successful business in that line until his retirement in 1852". Local newspapers for the period show that his business was totally destroyed by fire in the mid-1850's, and that subsequent to that, he was engaged at least part time as manufacturer's agent and business consultant.

Mr. Sisson, father of four children, was an active member of the Durham Agricultural Society and served as its treasurer for forty years. He was an active promoter of the first Mechanic's Institute, and raised and commanded a troop of cavalry (attached to the Durham Regiment), which assisted in the suppression of the rebellion of 1837-38.

Although the Belden Atlas account describes him as a man of "very heterodox opinions on religious subjects", he was a Church of England man and his name appears on various documents relating to St. Mark's (then St. John's) Church (51 King Street).

The land on which the house stands was part of the original Crown Grant to Jonathan Walton and Elias Smith of August 26, 1797. Although Sisson married a niece of Walton, the land had been assigned to Smith under a quitclaim in 1815, and Sisson purchased it from Smith's heir Horace Perry on April 9th, 1853, for the

sum of 750 pounds. Since an illustration of the house appears in the lower left hand corner of the Wall and Forrest Map published in late 1853, we may reasonably infer that it was built during the spring and summer of that year.

There were two dependencies: a carriage house (a two storey brick structure on a lot eventually severed and subsequently known municipally as 1 Percy Street), and a two-storey frame building very close to the intersection of the Base Line (Dorset Street) and Catherine Street. Both structures have been removed, the former having been torn down in 1894.

In 1894 the property passed to Henry A. (Harry) Sculthorpe, who lost in it bankruptcy proceedings in 1925. It was purchased in September 1926 by Duncan Allan Shay, prominent merchant and operator of a department store in the premises now occupied by his granddaughter, Susan Dewhurst. In September 1947, Shay sold to Col. Henry Tatham Goodeve, paymaster for the Canadian armed forces in Europe during the Second World. Col. Goodeve and his wife Beryl were both prominent and active members of the community in such organizations as the Board of Trade, Red Cross, Girl Guides, and St. Mark's Church.

