

Background:

In the summer of 2015, the Council of Prince Edward County purchased the property at 282/284 Wellington Main Street for the purpose of facilitating works on Lane Creek. The creek flows under a portion of both the buildings as it passes from Wharf Street to Main Street flowing south to Lake Ontario. 282 Main Street is located at the intersection of Wharf and Main Streets Wellington, with 284 Main Street attached to the corner building and located immediately west. Council conducted a Public Consultation Meeting on December 9, 2015, regarding potential uses/functions for the buildings and the property, prior to moving forward. This heritage assessment is provided for further information to assist in the decision making process regarding the fate of the buildings.

Development History:

The commercial or business core of the Town (Village) of Wellington was initially established at the eastern end of the present town and centered around the West Lake Harbour and Wharf at the end of the Town(ship) Line, now Belleville Street. Historic commercial buildings at this end of the Town from the earliest part of Wellington's history now essentially no longer exist as this primary development era was 1815 to 1860, and the oldest non-residential buildings have generally not survived. Gradually, the core of the Village gravitated to the east, into the valley of Lane Creek, due in part to the construction of another wharf and warehouse at the foot of Wharf Street and a wharf at Beach Street, but also due to evolution and transition of technology and transportation that facilitated an increase in, and changes to, commerce. As Wellington continued to serve as the commercial hub for the surrounding rural area, new mercantile, institutional, and financial enterprises were established in the new Town core from 1880 to 1920, and essentially provide the nucleus of what is considered the 'town center' today.

It is in this development period that the buildings at 282/284 Main Street were built and the businesses established. The two storey building (corner store) is presumed to be built in 1898, as Harriet and Miles Petit, a grocer (earlier tinsmith), mortgaged the property for 500 dollars (mortgage discharged in 1903). The property is thought to have had an earlier building, as the Goads Fire Insurance Map from 1892 depicts a smaller (in plan) storey and a half building and no adjacent building. It is speculated that the earlier smaller building on the corner was built adjacent to and south of, but not completely over, the creek. It is quite possible that the cellar now evident beneath the present building, and located in the southeast corner, is the foundation of the earliest building. Both the corner store and the adjacent store front at 284 Main Street are depicted on the 1900 Goads Fire Insurance Map, and at this time, the buildings were not joined.

Building Description:

The parcel purchased by Harriet and Miles Petit for the corner store measured only 24 feet X 56 feet, and the main block of the original store was built at 24 X 40 feet, with zero setbacks from the property

line at Main and Wharf Streets. Both buildings are wood frame, originally with wood cladding. The corner store as built is essentially as presented today, other than there have been some modest changes to the store front, with the windows and the upper balcony slightly altered. A bay window was added to the wharf street façade, appearing to be an early addition, no doubt to provide a better view up Wharf Street and to provide additional light in the living area. Doors and windows have also been covered on the Wharf Street lower façade. The form and outline of the shed roof attached at the back are still evident which provided the original access to the upper level together with a second level porch. Access to the upper level dwelling was later converted to an internal stair in the northeast corner accessed from the interior or Wharf Street and the back lean-to addition was converted to extra space for the mercantile below, and conversion to a back porch and bathroom above. A single story concrete block addition was later added to provide more storage/mechanical space on the lower level.

Certainly one of the most interesting features is the cantilevered attic storey over the front balcony, offering some protection to the outdoor balcony space below, but adding considerable interest to the main street façade. This projecting gable with the supporting brackets in an ogee form, or elongated 'S' shape, is similar in style to the work of prominent architect/builder Willard Wesley Fitzgerald, who worked in Wellington from 1880 to 1928. His accentuation of the gable has many examples in and around Wellington, and the combination with the ogee brackets has a close comparison in 230 and 232 Main Street Wellington, built in the same time period. The combination of projecting gable, balcony, and store front windows/entrance below add considerable architectural interest to an otherwise modest building.

The adjacent attached one storey building is assumed to have been built for commercial use due to its size and location directly adjacent to Main Street, closer to the street originally than the corner store. It is a single storey building essentially built right over the creek, with a small addition added later at the back. The original gable roofed building retains its boom town front, and was originally about four feet from the corner store, but the space in between was later filled and the buildings joined.

Building Uses:

The uses and spaces of the original corner building have continued to be functional since construction with the lower level reserved for business and the upper level for a dwelling, in a 'live/work' association. The building has been used as a grocery and also once in part a barber shop, but for most of its history it has been a grocery or convenience store. Frank Brimley Sr. was long associated with the store and then his son Francis (Frank Jr.) operated it for many years, later as the Lucky Dollar Food Store. Both Brimley men are well remembered by long time residents of the community. Cline Pierson, still a Wellington grocer, also has working links to the building and the Brimleys.

The adjacent building was for many years a butcher shop, and it may have been built with this use in mind. It seems that an Edward McMahon in 1906 may have owned both buildings, and the small building was until 1924 know as McMahons' Butcher Shop, and then continued as a butcher shop into the 1970s, associated with William Bailey and Ralph MacDonald, then the Bailey brothers Charlie and Ed, and later Harley Aman, a son-in-law to Frank Brimley Jr. It continued with other commercial uses thereafter until purchased by the Municipality.

Heritage Value or Interest:

This property has contextual value due to the location of the buildings and continuity of use within the core commercial area of Wellington. The buildings are important in maintaining and supporting the character of this prominent intersection, and represent early commercial buildings in the development of the Wellington business core, contributing to the unity of the total composition in this area of Wellington. The scale and massing of the buildings are appropriate to the immediate streetscape of the intersection, and to the Town as a whole. The zero lot setback on Main and Wharf Streets is important visually in order for the street to achieve the intimate and welcoming quality of an outdoor room, and also inherently provides vehicular traffic calming resulting from the sense of enclosure and the immediate proximity. The buildings and their uses are 'physically, functionally, visually and historically linked to the surroundings'. The buildings have been consistent as fixture commercial buildings in the Town, even though the specific uses have evolved with changes in retail patterns. Their siting and construction over Lane Creek add further consideration to the context of Town history and development, and their survival for over 100 years despite the risks of flood related damages is worth noting.

The corner store building has historic value within the Town of Wellington for its history of owners and with the architectural language of W. W, Fitzgerald, and may represent one of his building designs and construction for commercial/residential use. The architectural treatments as expressed in the building are unique and central to a gifted Wellington builder.

Conclusion:

It is the opinion of this writer that, based on the history and associated heritage value of the buildings, a worthy effort should be put forth in the decision making process to conserve the buildings and the streetscape. The corner store would seem to have greater value due to its location and physical presence, but the adjacent building is also important to the continuity of the streetscape. Physically, the adjacent one storey building may be less robust and salvage may not be practical, but any strategy for the redevelopment of this specific site should include a building and take its cue from the existing siting and have a goal to preserve the building line aspect to Main Street. Both buildings are modest and may be considered 'everyday' small town buildings, but their authenticity and well used history provide character and continuity to Wellington history. Although some have thought them better demolished, it is difficult to ignore the buildings for their 'testimonial value and historical memory'. These buildings make it apparent that County heritage is not just about the grand buildings such as the Court House, Town Halls or stately homes, it is also about the smaller, less refined buildings, where personal experiences and interactions are made, and where the community has passed by one another for over 100 years.

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Member: Prince Edward County Heritage Advisory Committee
Architectural Conservancy Ontario
Community Heritage Ontario
Heritage Canada

References:

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5. The Settler's Dream, Tom Cruikshank and Peter John Stokes, 1984
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