

31-37 King Street East, Village of Omemee (Ivory and Williamson Block)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Omemee

LT 11 N/S KING ST AND W/S STURGEON ST PL 109; PT BLK 16 PL 109 AS IN R167853; KAWARTHA LAKES

LT 17 N/S KING ST AND E/S ALMA ST PL 109; E1/2 LT 16 N/S KING ST AND E/S ALMA ST PL 109; KAWARTHA LAKES

2024



Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The subject property has been researched and evaluated in order to determine its cultural heritage significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990. A property is eligible for designation if it has physical, historical, associative or contextual value and meets any two of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. A heritage evaluation of the property has determined that 31-37 King Street East has cultural heritage value or interest and merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:

i. is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method:

31-37 King Street East was constructed between 1890 and 1892 and is a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial block in Omemee. There are several examples of this type of commercial structure that remain extant in Omemee, although they are rare elsewhere in Kawartha Lakes. The property demonstrates key features of the style including its characteristic mansard roof with ornate dormers, brackets, and decorative brickwork.

ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit:

The property displays a typical degree of craftsmanship for a property of this type.

iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement:

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

2. The property has historical or associative value because it:

i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to the community:

The property has direct associations with the general store and local merchants Thomas Ivory and Sons and Eli Williamson who constructed the building for their retail establishments and residences. The two businesses were a general store and harness shop and built this establishment following the 1891 fire that destroyed much of downtown Omemee. It also has direct associations with this fire and the rebuilding campaign that occurred in the village in the early years of the 1890s.

ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture:

The property yields information regarding the commercial development of Omemee in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as the rebuilding of the community after the 1891 fire that devastated the downtown area of the village and most of its commercial establishments.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:
The designer and builder of the property is unknown.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area:

The property helps maintain and support the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of several Second Empire style commercial buildings along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:

The property is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the historic commercial landscape of downtown Omemee. It forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street and is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings from the 1890s that form the downtown core of the village.

iii. is a landmark.

The property is not a specific landmark.

Design and Physical Value

31-37 King Street East has design and physical value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial building in Omemee. The style, which was popular at the end of the nineteenth century, is relatively rare in Kawartha Lakes, although there are several extant examples in Omemee. The subject property, constructed between 1891 and 1892, is a good example of the style and demonstrates its key features including the characteristic mansard roof, ornate dormer windows, decorative brickwork and pilasters. It is representative of the execution of this style in Omemee in the early 1890s when the commercial core of the village underwent a period of reconstruction after a series of devastating fires.

Commercial architecture in Canada's cities, towns and villages, including Omemee, underwent a period of significant evolution throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest commercial architecture was purely functional, such as small general stores or blacksmith's shops in nascent communities where the proprietors would build a structure, often in a vernacular style, near or adjacent to their residence. As the century wore on, these structures often took on the stylistic trappings of contemporary architectural styles, but remained relatively basic detached structures on their own lots. A new structural type also developed: a two-storey structure with the commercial establishment on the main floor and the business owner's residence on the upper storey. Architecturally, these buildings still generally resembled residential structures although the ground floor would often have larger window to showcase the store's products. This type of arrangement was, and remained, typical for small hamlets with a few commercial enterprises.

However, with the increasing urbanization of many of the province's communities, commercial architecture was forced to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of Ontario's towns and cities; this change was not limited to Ontario and is reflective of the condition of commercial structures across North America. One of the most significant changes was the centralization of commercial structures together in downtown areas. Although the concept of formal zoning was just being developed during this period, it was a time when commercial enterprises and work were being moved outside of the home and businesses were beginning to establish their own spaces in communities; as had and was continuing to occur in urban centres in Europe, businesses naturally clustered together for convenience, creating the beginnings of the commercial downtown and the idea of a main street.

As more businesses came together to form a downtown core, their buildings began to get closer together to respond to the increasing density and desire to not waste limited space. By the mid-century, the idea of commercial buildings being linked in a continuous street wall was common in urban areas as commercial structures were built directly adjacent to one another and even

shared dividing walls. This arrangement was a direct mirror of European urban spaces where tightly packed commercial cores necessitated buildings attached to one another, and built directly to the edge of the lot to maximize space. In the early days of this new commercial arrangement, two types of buildings prevailed. The first were two- to three storey buildings similar to a basic Georgian plan, and often with a gable roof divided by a parapet wall, forming a continuous gable along the street; good examples of this type of structure can be seen in Kingston where a substantial portion of the downtown developed during this time. Like their predecessors, these invariably included commercial space on the ground floor with residential space on the second and third storeys; the third storey was often located in the gable and included dormer windows for light. This was a continuation of the two-part commercial block which had developed in the first part of the nineteenth century. The second was the use of false facades to create the look of a much taller building when in fact, a flat rectangular façade was applied to a much smaller, generally gable roofed structure behind it. These were usually built in wood and located in areas where erecting a large commercial building was not feasible. Examples of this type of commercial architecture are less common because they were often replaced with larger brick buildings, but there are extant examples in Kawartha Lakes, particularly in Bethany where several of these structures are still standing. In both types, the idea of the storefront had developed with large windows and often a recessed entrance to show off products and entice shoppers inside. Whichever form of architecture they used, these mid-century streetscapes were often an eclectic mix of architectural forms but represented the shift towards a highly urbanized downtown with densely packed buildings, a continuous street wall and distinctive commercial architecture separate from purely residential spaces.

By the late 1850s, new architectural styles had evolved to respond to the need for urban commercial space. The most common of these was the Italianate which was ubiquitous in commercial downtowns throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Characterized by its exaggerated use of Italian and other European Renaissance architecture such as wide eaves with decorative brackets, decorative brick and iron work and arched windows with elaborate hoods and surrounds along with flat roofs and expansive cornices, the style suited itself well to compact, high density commercial spaces where ornament could be applied to the front façade of a building to maximum effect. The majority were two to four storeys high enough to create upper storey residential or, by this time, office space, but still short enough to allow a person to comfortably ascend to the top storey by the stairs. This gave architects several storeys, albeit only on one side, of a building to craft ornate and decorative spaces.

The other major style for commercial buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century was the Second Empire style. While less common than the

Italianate style, it still was a major influence of the stylistic evolution of commercial downtowns in the second half of the century, where it was combined with Italianate buildings to create a diverse streetscape, albeit one comprised of highly ornate masonry structures with similar, but distinct, aesthetic approaches.

The Second Empire style developed in the 1850s in Europe and was quickly adopted into North American urban centres. The style itself is named after the Second French Empire and the reign of Napoleon III between 1852 and 1870. During this period, Napoleon III who was determined to make Paris into a fashionable and influential cosmopolitan centre worked alongside urban planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann to reimagine and redevelop vast swathes of the city centre beginning in the 1850s. While this included vital infrastructure, such as new sewers, it also included an aesthetic reimagining of the city as older buildings were demolished to make way for wide boulevards, new parks and squares and new public and private buildings, constructed in a consciously urban form and included mansard roofs, an architectural feature that became synonymous with French architecture during this period; the mansard roof itself was developed by French architect François Mansart during the seventeenth century French Baroque period, although it did not reach the height of its popularity until two centuries later.

As a roof style, the mansard roof had a number of advantages over hipped, flat or gable roofs. It was particularly well-suited for rows of commercial buildings with upper storey offices or apartments as well as townhouses and could be used to heighten a building effectively a full storey without the additional cost of masonry. In some urban areas, it was also used to circumvent zoning restrictions as height was often only measured to the cornice line, meaning that any living space contained within a mansard roof was exempt and additional height could be added with a large mansard roof without restriction. It was also particularly well-suited to decorative embellishments which made it popular during the Victorian period where high levels of decoration were preferred: mansard roofs could support, for example, features such as ornate dormer window surrounds, elaborate cornices, polychromatic shingles in patterns shown in the large roof size, and decorative ironwork, that could be challenging to incorporate into other roof types. Flat roofs, for example, which were used in a large number of Victorian commercial buildings were not as well suited to using the roof as a medium for decoration or as a decorative feature itself.

In addition to its mansard roof, the style had a number of other key features that helped define it as separate from other architectural styles popular in the mid to late nineteenth century. With regard to its massing, the style was defined, particularly in its larger examples, by pavilion massing that broke up the large façade into defined and distinctive units; in highly urban settings

where it was used for commercial buildings and townhouses, pavilion massing was mimics through the use of pilasters and columns to divide large buildings into bays. It also typically employed a high degree of ornamentation, such as columns, brackets, rustication, cornices and iron cresting; these elements were mostly drawn from the Classical tradition, and in its day, the style was often referred to not as Second Empire, but rather as the Italian or Renaissance style as a nod to its roots in the Classical tradition. Overall, the style was consciously an urban one that adapted Classical and Baroque forms to suit the dense urban centres of the nineteenth century, both through its large and ornate interpretation in public buildings and more commonplace use for townhouses and commercial blocks.

The first examples of the Second Empire style outside of France came as early as the 1850s with structures such as the Great Western Railway Hotel at Paddington Station and several buildings within the Whitehall complex; these buildings were built at the same time as the Paris reconstruction efforts and show the rapid dissemination of architectural styles throughout Europe at this period. France, and the French court, carried significant international influence and its fashionable architectural preferences quickly spread elsewhere as others sought to mimic these trends. In particular, it was used heavily in public buildings where it was seen to exude permanence, wealth, stability and strength. It emerged in the United States in the early 1860s with the construction of Boston City Hall between 1862 and 1865 and gained particular prominence in the Reconstruction era for public buildings where its symbolic connotations extended to representation of a strong central government after years of divisive war.

In Canada, early examples began to appear in the 1860s, but the style did not gain wide popularity until the 1870s when they started to be widely used by the federal government as part of the Department of Public Works' post-Confederation building programme. These new buildings, which were intended to signify stability, permanence and the wealth and promise of a new nation, were constructed in cities across Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, and included government offices and other federal structures, like post offices; the new buildings constructed in the Second Empire style included the first such buildings erected under this nation-building scheme, the Toronto General Post Office, constructed between 1871 and 1874. The style was also readily adopted by provincial and municipal governments for large public buildings; it should be noted, however, that most of these were located in large and prosperous urban centres as Second Empire buildings, particularly their more ornate examples, were very expensive to build and out of reach and not practical for smaller centres.

While public buildings provided the largest and most ornate examples, the Second Empire style was also quickly adapted for domestic and commercial

use. Domestic examples began appearing in pattern books as early as the 1860s and its ornate aesthetic became favoured by wealthy clients by the 1870s for new houses and mansions; significant and large examples of Second Empire domestic architecture can be found in cities and towns across Canada showcasing mansard roofs with ornate decorative features and overtly displaying the wealth of their original occupants. The style was particularly favoured for the new suburban villas of the political and business elite who began, during this period, to erect large homes on the edges of urban centres with wide lawns. It was, however, sufficiently fashionable that it was also adapted for smaller and less opulent dwellings, including single detached homes and townhouses in towns where mansard roofs were well used as additional living space. It did primarily remain an urban style, with most of its examples concentrated in towns and cities.

The style was also readily adopted for new commercial buildings. Its initial development as part of the Paris reconstruction efforts made it easily adaptable to commercial buildings elsewhere; it was eminently suited to the new urban commercial streetscapes forming in North American cities and towns that featured continuous streetwalls built to the lot line and ornate decoration on the front façade of the building. Like the Italianate style, Second Empire architecture was a good design solution for the growing compact and dense urban landscape that characterized commercial centres in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like its public and domestic counterparts, Second Empire commercial architecture was characterized first and foremost by its mansard roof with dormer windows which were easily integrated into the urban streetscape. These buildings also included a range of decorative elements drawn from the Classical traditional, including brackets, polychromatic brickwork and shingles, ornate window surrounds, and decorative brickwork, in some cases very similar to its Italianate neighbours.

The heyday of the style was short, lasting from about 1870 to the early 1880s in Canada; by the end of the 1880s, it had fallen out of fashion in favour of other architectural styles, particularly for public buildings. It did not completely disappear, however, and examples of both domestic and commercial versions of the style continued to be erected until the end of the nineteenth century. The continuous development of commercial downtowns throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, whether precipitated by changing fashions or by fires, meant that new commercial buildings were being constructed throughout the second half of the century in dense urban cores and some designers and clients still preferred to use the Second Empire style, whether for the economy of housing a third or fourth storey in a mansard roof instead of using masonry or as result of stylistic preferences.

31-37 King Street East was constructed between 1890 and 1891, well outside of the style's peak popularity. However, it followed a wider trend in Omemee

itself where the Second Empire was used extensively in commercial buildings in the early years of the 1890s. This period marked a time of major reconstruction in the commercial core of the village after three devastating fires in 1890, 1891 and 1892 that destroyed most of the commercial structures along King Street East. In rebuilding the downtown, a number of new Second Empire commercial buildings, including the subject property, were erected as replacements for older buildings destroyed in the fires.

The subject property is a simplified version of the style including both residential and commercial spaces, with the commercial spaces on the end of the block and the residential spaces on the upper storeys and interior townhouses. As with all Second Empire style buildings, its defining feature is its mansard roof which stretches the length of the property and was designed to facilitate the construction of additional commercial structures to form a continuous streetwall. The roof features dormer windows with ornate surrounds including decorative brackets, woodwork, and rounded sash windows. Its masonry floors are divided into bays by pilasters and include dog tooth coursing, brackets and rounded sash windows. It is not as ornate as many examples of the style in larger urban centres, but is consistent with its execution in smaller communities where it was generally less ornate and smaller, but still displaying the key characteristics of the style. When viewed in relation to other Second Empire style buildings in Omemee, it displays a similar level of ornateness, as well as consistent size and massing, to other structures along King Street East. This example has also been modified on the ground floor with the addition of the modern one-storey addition on the west side of the building to serve as a grocery storey, which has removed the ground floor store front on the west side. Nevertheless, it still demonstrates the key aspects of the style and is demonstrative of Second Empire commercial architecture as executed in Omemee in the 1890s.

Historical and Associative Value

31-37 King Street East has historical and associative value as the Williamson and Ivory Block. Constructed between 1890 and 1891, it yields information regarding the reconstruction of Omemee after a series of fires in the early 1890s and the development of its businesses in the late nineteenth century. It has direct historical relationships with the history of commercial and economic development in Omemee as home to two important local businesses in the late nineteenth century: Williamson's Harness and Shoe Store and Thomas Ivory and Sons General Store. Through these businesses, it provides information regarding the economic growth of the community throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Omemee was established in the mid-1820s with the construction of a Mill on the Pigeon River, where the village is now located. Emily Township had been formally opened for non-indigenous settlement in 1821 and, in the same year,

large numbers of primarily Protestant Irish settlers arrived in the area and took up land in the southern part of Emily as well as in Cavan Township to the east. The area around what is now the village was acquired by the Cottingham family, Maurice and Mary Cottingham of County Cavan and their sons Samuel and William, who established a shanty near the river, alongside the Laidley and English families who travelled with them. By 1825, the mill was established by William Cottingham, Maurice and Mary's younger son, eventually becoming the commercial and industrial nucleus of the village; this was also the first grist mill established in what would later become Victoria County.

The first store in the community was open by 1826 and run by Samuel Cottingham in close proximity to his brother's mill. The influx of settlers in Emily Township, both the Protestant group of which the Cottingshams were a part and the Peter Robinson settlement scheme which brought large numbers of Irish Catholic settlers in the mid-1820s, meant a significant demand for goods and the new general store served a real need in the surrounding township. The mill and store soon became the focal point for the surrounding area and, slowly, a small community began to develop in close proximity and a village plot was soon laid out, for a community then known as Williamstown. This kind of rapid growth and development of local businesses was common for early mill sites, as mills were key infrastructure in early agricultural communities and vital economic drivers; settlers often travelled long distances to access them. The post office was established in 1835, as well as a local school in the same year. 1857 saw the arrival of the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway which helped bolster the economic prospects of the village with a new and direct route to regional markets for the growing village's agricultural and other products. It was first renamed Metcalf in the 1840s and then later, Omemee. It formally incorporated as a village separate from Emily Township in 1874.

The 1858 Peterborough and Victoria Counties directory shows the progress of the village, just over thirty years from the establishment of Cottingham's mill, when its population had reached around 500 people. Of Omemee, the authors of the directory wrote:

The principle village in the township of Emily is situated on Pigeon River, which, beside supplying it with Hydraulic power, promises to be an important inlet for the produce and lumber of the northern townships. It has one excellent flouring and grist mill, with three run of stones; a very good saw mill, and a carding and fulling mill, all worked by water power. It contains two churches – an Episcopalian and Wesleyan; a grammar school; fifteen stores – some of them are good ones; two bakeries and groceries; two taverns, and a temperance hotel; three saloons; and

blacksmiths, coopers, waggon makers, show makers, tailors, carpenters, harness makers, and dress makers, in fair numbers. Omemee boasts a very excellent newspaper the “Warder” published by Mr. Joseph Cooper. It is on the line, and is one of the most important stations, of the Port Hope, Lindsay Beaverton and Railroad; and should the inhabitants be successful in procuring Government assistance to dredge and improve the navigation of Pigeon River – now capable, when the water is high, of floating a steamer to the village – there is little doubt that it will become a town of very great importance.¹

The village contained a wide variety of stores, typical of a mid-nineteenth century small town, including the standard general stores, grocers, and blacksmiths, alongside more specialized commercial enterprises, such as coopers, tailors, harness makers and shoemakers that typically only established their businesses in communities large enough to support them. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Omemee’s economy, and population boomed, as it continued to develop into an important centre for the surrounding rural townships and as a manufacturing and commercial centre, boasting saw, grist and carding mills.

Omemee reached its peak nineteenth century population by the late 1870s, with over 800 inhabitants, before slowly declining throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. This was a common trend in rural and small town Ontario around the turn of the century when an exodus was occurring from rural to urban areas as a result of shifting economic opportunities that favoured urban centres. By 1898, the Eastern Ontario Gazetteer and Directory reported a population of 600 people and a range of services and businesses, similar in many ways to the size and economic power of the community in 1858.

The subject property was constructed between 1890 and 1891 as the business premises and residence for two local Omeme businesses: Williamson’s Harness and Shoe Store and Thomas Ivory and Sons General Store. Both of these stores existed prior to 1890 and the new structures were replacement premises for older buildings that were destroyed in a series of fires that swept the commercial core of the community in 1890, 1891, and 1892.

Omemee, like other communities across Ontario, was significantly shaped by fires. In a time period where heating and lighting were accomplished using fireplaces, woodstoves, candles and lanterns, building fires happened frequently and spread rapidly. This was exacerbated by the fact that many

¹ Directory of the United Counties of Peterborough and Victoria for 1858 (Peterborough: T&R White, 1858), 38.

buildings, until the second half of the nineteenth century, were built of wood which caught fire, burned quickly and spread easily between structures which were often clustered close together, particularly in commercial areas. Even masonry, which was increasingly used for new commercial buildings throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in part to reduce the impact of fires, was still susceptible to fires and could still be destroyed in a large blaze, albeit less easily than its predecessors.

The number of major fires in Omemee in the nineteenth century is not known, but it is known that the town suffered significantly prior to 1877 when it established its first fire brigade, in response to several large fires in the early 1870s, including one at the Ivory sawmill which narrowly avoided a much larger and more widespread blaze. By this time, many of the earliest buildings in the downtown had been replaced by newer masonry structures. The 1881 Fire Insurance plan of the village shows King Street East as a mix of masonry and wooden structures as the village slowly transitioned to a brick dominated downtown landscape.

The fires that precipitated the building of the subject property happened in rapid succession, in 1890 and 1891, followed by another fire in 1892; all of these fires were, at the time, believed to have been deliberately set, unlike most fires that this time which were accidental and usually a direct result of nineteenth century heating, cooking, and lighting. These three fires together destroyed most of downtown Omemee and precipitated a significant rebuilding effort that resulted in the landscape of the village as it now appears. The first of these fires, on June 2, 1890, began in Blackwell House, a hotel on the corner of King Street East and Colborne Street North. The Lindsay Watchman reported:

Last Monday morning about four o'clock fire was discovered in the old Blackwell House, an old brick hotel unoccupied for some time past, and the alarm was quickly sounded. Despite the efforts of the fireman, assisted by the citizens, the flames spread rapidly, and the adjoining stores were soon ablaze... Following is a list of the losses and insurance: Blackwell House, loss \$3,000, insured for \$2,000; Williamson's boot and shoe store and harness shop, loss \$6,000, insurance \$1,800; T. Ivory and Sons, general merchants, loss estimated at \$10,000, insured for \$7,600; Miller's tailor shop, loss \$3,500, insurance \$1,500; Mrs. Marr, whose store was occupied by W.H. Spence, implement agent, loss \$1,000, insurance \$500. The fire is believed to have been the work of an incendiary.²

² "Destructive Fire in Omemee," *Lindsay Watchman*, June 5, 1890, 5.

The second of these fires occurred on August 27, 1891. This was the largest of the 1890s fires in Omemee and began in the stables of Clark's Hotel, before the wind spread it quickly along the south side of King Street East. The fire destroyed at least eleven commercial premises, including the Great Northwestern Telegraph office and the large brick block on the southwest corner of King and George streets that contained Clark's Hotel itself, the Windsor Hotel, and Ivory's general store, which had been relocated on account of the 1890 fire to an existing storefront in that block. The fire's path also engulfed a number of residential buildings along King Street, as well as sheds, outbuildings and stables.

The last of the three major fires occurred on April 28, 1892 and finished the destruction of the downtown; only a handful of buildings survived all three fires. This fire primarily impacted the south side of King Street in the block between George and Sturgeon Streets. The *Canadian Post* reported:

Omeme has had another disastrous fire, causing losses estimated at \$15,000. The fire broke out last Friday night about 10 o'clock, in Mr. Thomas Stephenson's old store - D. Minn's harness shop. A prompt alarm was given, and it was no time until willing hands were removing stock and contents of adjoining stores and residences. There was a strong wind that fanned the flames and it was no time until George Morrison's brick residence on the east and J.J. Lundy's building, occupied on the west by Wm. Millier, tailor, RECORDER office, and H.T. Everett, jeweller, were in flames. The fire extended to T.J. Parson's fine store and residence on the corner west of Lundy's building, burned south to Mary St., consuming all the sheds, stables, hose-house and lock up on the entire block...There is scarcely any question that the fire was the work of an incendiary, and this is the third disastrous one in the village from presumably the same cause within the past two years. The result is that over three acres, formerly the active and businesses part of the place, is now covered by rubbish of the late disastrous fires.³

The impact of these fires on Omemee's business community, both material and financial, cannot be overstated. A prosperous community with a range of successful businesses needed to be rebuilt, and it was beginning soon after the first fire in 1890, and continuing into the mid-1890s. The reconstruction efforts yielded a new, but remarkably consistent streetscape built primarily in the

³ "Another Disastrous Fire" *Canadian Post*, May 6, 1892, 3.

Second Empire style as some, but not all, of the pre-1890 buildings destroyed in the fires had been.

The subject property was part of this reconstructed and was built in two halves, in 1890 and 1891. The first half – the eastern half – was constructed by Eli Williamson as a replacement for his older premises which stood on the same location and was destroyed in the 1890 fire; its reconstruction began later that same year. Williamson was born in Cavan Township, near Millbrook and came to Omemee in 1864 where he bought out the harness business then owned by William Elliot as Williamson had trained in harness making and saddlery in Peterborough and later New York state before coming to the village. This was a time when harness making was in high demand due to the heavy reliance of most people on horses for work and transportation and the business prospered. Williamson built himself a new premise at the location of the subject property at some point in the 1870s; he purchased the lot in 1874. However, by the late 1880s, Williamson, along with his sons George and Arthur, had expanded his wares to include boots and shoes, an expansion that served him well with the gradual decline of the horse and rise of the automobile at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as an increase in factory made harnesses. Williamson died in 1921 with his son George taking over the business until its eventual closure in 1945. Williamson also ran an apiary to the rear of the store, where his family also lived.

The older store was adjacent to the Blackwell House Hotel where the 1890 fire originated and quickly succumbed to the fire, along with the Williamson family residence. At the time, Williamson, his wife Priscilla, all six of their children, who ranged in age from 14 to 31 and their daughter Lillian's two children ages 7 and 2, were living in the house. To accommodate the large family, a residence was built alongside the shop which continued to house the family alongside their new commercial premises.

The other side of the building was built as the replacement store for Thomas Ivory & Sons general store, run by Thomas Ivory, of Lotus in Manvers Township, and his three sons Charles, Thomas Jr., and Frederick, along with two residences. One of the new residences was occupied by the elder Ivory and his wife Esther, daughter of Henry English one of the original founders of Omemee who came to the area with his cousins, the Cottinghams, in the early 1820s. The other was occupied by Charles and his wife Sarah McQuade, the youngest daughter of Reeve of Emily Township and Conservative MP for Victoria South, Arthur McQuade.

The Ivorys came to Omemee at some point prior to 1880 where James Ivory – Thomas' brother – had married Elizabeth English, Esther's cousin, and had lived in the village until his untimely death in 1876. Thomas had previously operated a woolen mill in Lotus before coming to Omemee where he leased the carding

mill, and also opened a stove and tinware shop on the south side of King Street. At the same time, Thomas and his sons expanded into the general store business, eventually shifting fully into general store operation. It was reported that a significant portion of their business came from Manvers Township, given Thomas' form residence there and good reputation in Lotus and the surrounding area.

The Ivorys lost their premises not once, but twice in the fires of the early 1890s. By 1890, they had moved into a premise beside Williamson's on the north side of King Street and this structure was subsequently lost in the 1890 fire. They then moved into a building owned by William Cottingham on the south side of King Street, which burned in the 1891 fire. However, they had quickly rebuilt, with a new premise on the north side of King Street – the subject property – that was fortunately spared from the 1892 blaze. The store was widely spoken of as one of the finest in Victoria County for its high level of finish and good quality stock, including dry goods, furnishings, clothes, shoes and groceries. After Thomas' retirement, it was taken over fully by Charles until his retirement, then death in 1946.

These two stores, Ivory's and Williamson's, are just two of the businesses that thrived, rebuilt and continued to operate in Omemee in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, before and after the major fires of the early 1890s. Like others in the community, the formed the backbone of the community's economic growth and important business community. Their narratives, coming to Omemee in the 1860s and 1870s and building thriving and important local businesses, are common stories in Omemee of this era, which grew substantially throughout the 1860s and 1870s with the arrival of the railway, reaching its economic and demographic zenith as an important centre for the surrounding rural hinterland. Both Eli Williamson and Thomas Ivory were part of this influx of new residents and business owners into the village in the railway era, likely attracted by its economic prospect and, in Ivory's case, existing family ties to the community. Despite the gradual exodus from the community in the later decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth, both businesses stayed and operated side by side until into the 1940s. Both of these businesses were well regarded, as were their proprietors, in the community.

In this way, these two businesses, and by extension their extant post-1890 premises, yield information regarding the economic growth of Omemee in the second half of the nineteenth century as the village grew and made way for new shops and businesses that continued to thrive into the twentieth century. The property also yields information regarding the reconstruction of downtown Omemee after the fires of the early 1890s which had a significant impact on the commercial core of the community.

Contextual Value

31-37 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintain and supports the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings dating from the 1890s along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street. It is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the village's downtown streetscape.

The subject property was constructed between 1890 and 1891 as part of a general rebuilding of downtown Omemee after a series of three disastrous fires that swept the commercial core of the village in 1890, 1891 and 1892. These three fires destroyed the majority of commercial buildings along King Street, as well as a number of residential properties and outbuildings. The rebuilding effort was significant and resulted in a collection of late nineteenth century commercial architecture, including the subject property, that formed a cohesive and consistent commercial streetscape along King Street East.

The rebuilding effort produced a range of new commercial buildings, many of which are still extant in downtown Omemee and form its commercial core. What is unique about the rebuilding in Omemee was the large number of Second Empire buildings constructed there. While Second Empire buildings were popular across Canada throughout the 1870s and 1880s, they had declined significantly in popularity by the 1890s and a collection of the size that exists in Omemee is rare, both for the 1890s and in Kawartha Lakes more generally. The subject property, like others built around the same time, was erected in the Second Empire style and is physically, visually, and historically linked to the rest of this collection, as a Second Empire style structure, as part of Omemee's 1890s reconstruction, and as part of the existing commercial streetscape. Additional Second Empire style buildings in the downtown include 13-17 King Street East, 16-22 King Street East, and 46 King Street East. These structures have a shared history as well as a shared architectural style and function in concert with one another as part of the downtown landscape.

Omemee's current commercial core stretches from approximately Sturgeon Street in the west to Colborne Street North in the east; while King Street continued both east and west beyond this, the commercial structures give way to residential and institutional buildings. Between these two cross streets, King Street East, on both the north and south sides, is lined with commercial establishments. While some have been constructed more recently, the majority date from the late nineteenth century and taken together form a cohesive, historic small town downtown area with a variety of stores and businesses. This mix of buildings is typical of downtown areas in small town Ontario that date from the late nineteenth century which generally contain a concentration

of historic commercial buildings, in both the Italianate and Second Empire styles, alongside other structures, such as residences or modern commercial structures; this is also the case in Omemee. 31-37 King Street East supports and maintains this historic small town streetscape as part of this collection of buildings. Constructed in the Second Empire style, as are many of the other historic buildings in the downtown, it is built to the sidewalk and forms part of a Victorian streetwall along King Street East. These are typical features of a late Victorian downtown that are maintained by this extant structure in combination with the other late Victorian commercial buildings that form part of this historic landscape.

Summary of Reasons for Designation

The short statement of reasons for designation and the description of the heritage attributes of the property, along with all other components of the Heritage Designation Brief, constitute the Reasons for Designation required under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

Design and Physical Value

31-35 King Street East has design and physical value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial building in Omemee. The style, which was popular at the end of the nineteenth century, is relatively rare in Kawartha Lakes, although there are several extant examples in Omemee. The subject property, constructed between 1891 and 1892, is a good example of the style and demonstrates its key features including the characteristic mansard roof, ornate dormer windows, decorative brickwork and pilasters. It is representative of the execution of this style in Omemee in the early 1890s when the commercial core of the village underwent a period of reconstruction after a series of devastating fires.

Historic and Associative Value

31-37 King Street East has historical and associative value as the Williamson and Ivory Block. Constructed between 1890 and 1891, it yields information regarding the reconstruction of Omemee after a series of fires in the early 1890s and the development of its businesses in the late nineteenth century. It has direct historical relationships with the history of commercial and economic development in Omemee as home to two important local businesses in the late nineteenth century: Williamson's Harness and Shoe Store and Thomas Ivory and Sons General Store. Through these businesses, it provides information regarding the economic growth of the community throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Contextual Value

31-37 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintain and supports the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings dating from the 1890s along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street. It is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the village's downtown streetscape.

Summary of Heritage Attributes to be Designated

The Reasons for Designation include the following heritage attributes and apply to all elevations, unless otherwise specified, and the roof including: all façades, entrances, windows, chimneys, and trim, together with construction

materials of wood, brick, stone, stucco, concrete, plaster parging, metal, glazing, their related building techniques and landscape features.

Design and Physical Attributes

The design and physical attributes of the property support its value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial property in Omamee.

- Two-and-a-half storey buff brick construction
- Mansard roof including:
 - Dormer windows
 - Decorative woodwork
 - Brackets
- Decorative brickwork
- Pilasters
- Brackets
- Wide eaves
- Fenestration including:
 - Rounded sash windows
 - Transoms
- Residential entrances
- Surviving Victorian storefront

Historical and Associative Attributes

The historical and associative attributes of the property support its value as an important space for local businesses as a longstanding commercial property and in its role as part of the history of commercial development and the post-1890 reconstruction of Omamee.

- Former use as Williamson's Harness and Shoe Shop and T. Ivory & Sons General Store
- Relationship to the history of commercial development in Omamee
- Relationship to other buildings erected as part of the post-1890 reconstruction of Omamee

Contextual Attributes

The contextual attributes of the property support its value as a contributing feature to the historic streetscape of downtown Omamee.

- Construction to the lot line
- Views of the property along King Street East
- Views from the property along King Street East
- Relationship to other Second Empire style buildings in downtown Omamee

Images







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