

Advisory Committee of Council Information Report



Committee	Heritage Guelph
Date	Monday, November 13, 2023
Subject	28 Norfolk Street – Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report

Description

This information report provides a draft statement of significance and determination of cultural heritage value or interest for the stone structure at 28 Norfolk Street known as St. Agnes School. This report is presented to Heritage Guelph for review and comment in preparation for a notice of intention to designate the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Executive Summary

Key Findings

The stone structure at 28 Norfolk Street known as St. Agnes School is a listed (non-designated) property on the Municipal Register of Cultural Heritage Properties. This report determines that 28 Norfolk Street, formerly known as St. Agnes School, meets seven of the prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, according to Ontario Regulation 9/06, as amended by Ontario Regulation 569/22. The heritage attributes 28 Norfolk Street display: design or physical, historical or associative, and contextual value.

Report

Location

The subject property is located on the northwest corner of Catholic Hill on the south side of Cork Street between Norfolk Street and Dublin Street. The legal description is PLAN 8 PT CHURCH LANDS.

Background

The subject property is part of Plan 8 PT CHURCH LANDS; gifted to Bishop Macdonell of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Toronto by John Galt in 1827. As the Catholic population of Guelph gradually grew in the first decades of Guelph's development, so too did the ecclesiastic presence on "Catholic Hill." In 1852, the Jesuit Father John Holzer was assigned to the parish by Bishop John Farrell of the

Diocese of Hamilton: both men shared the vision of an impressive educational campus atop Catholic Hill.

Formal Catholic education in the City of Guelph began with the appointment of Patrick Joseph Downey as the city's first Separate School teacher on January 16, 1854. Catholic educational capacity in Guelph was greatly expanded when the Loretto Convent was founded on June 10, 1856, with Rev. Mother Berchmanns Lalor as Superior of the House. The Sisters of Loretto, or, The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were a religious congregation committed to the provision of education. Girls were educated and boarded in the convent, which became known as the Loretto Academy.

In 1863, the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada (Ontario) passed the Scott Act, which guaranteed the rights of separate schools and provided public funding for Catholic education. The ensuing decades witnessed a great expansion of Catholic education across the province, and in the early 1880s it was decided to add two day-school buildings to the Catholic campus: St. Stanislaus school for boys and St. Agnes' school for girls. While wealthier families paid for their daughters to be educated at the Loretto Academy, St. Agnes offered free education to girls from working class families.

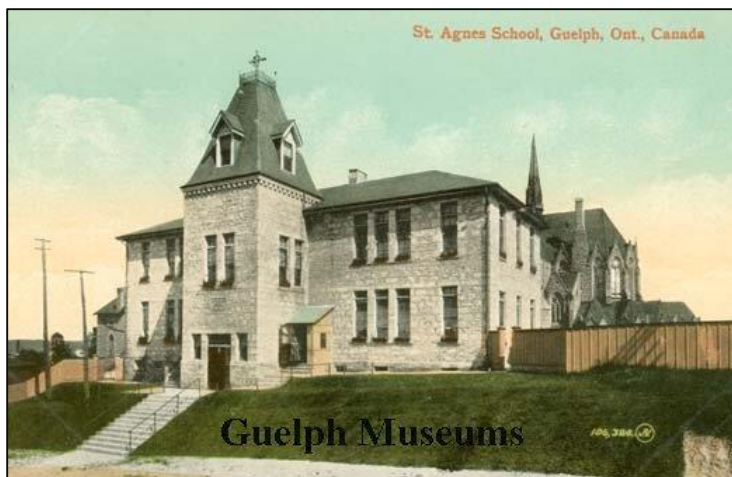


Figure 1: 1913 Colourized Postcard of St Agnes School, Guelph Civic Museum, 1986.18.55

In 1883, the Diocese of Hamilton commissioned architect John Hall Jr. to design two stone schools on Catholic Hill: A new building for St. Stanislaus boy's school was constructed to the south of the Church of Our Lady on Northumberland Street, and St. Agnes School to the north on Cork Street. Hall was raised in Guelph and trained as a builder by his father. After a brief period working as a builder and contractor during the oil boom in Petrolia and Oil Springs, Hall returned to Guelph to pursue architecture. Over the course of his brief career, Hall designed nearly thirty commercial, ecclesiastical, residential and institutional buildings in Guelph Listowel, Galt, and Alliston. Hall designed several notable buildings in Guelph, including the Gowdy Mansion at 136 Glasgow St, the Lyon mansion at 67 Queen Street, and the Bell Organ Factory, now demolished. Hall later became an alderman on Guelph City Council and Chairman of the Buildings and Sites Committee of the Guelph Board of Education. He died of pneumonia 1886 at the age of 46 years (Guelph Daily Mercury, 22 Feb. 1886, p. 1). Hall's 1883 design

of St. Agnes was a one-storey construction built with local limestone in the Neo-Classical vernacular. The 1882 Fire Insurance plan shows a protrusion on the Cork street facade that indicates the building likely contained a gable-roofed frontispiece, similar to the frontispiece on the rear façade of the current structure.

By the early 20th century, the school was overcrowded and, in 1908, the Diocese hired architect William Mahoney to design a second-storey addition that would double the capacity of the school. Mahoney was born in Guelph and studied architecture in Chicago from 1893-94, a time of great architectural innovation spurred by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. One of the most significant Guelph-based architects of the early twentieth century, Mahoney designed several notable local buildings, including 176 Woolwich Street in 1906 (now The Wooly Pub), an addition to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in 1908, and, in partnership with Aaron Austin, the Royal Theatre in 1935 with its distinctive brick façade on Macdonell Street (now Trapper's Alley). However, he is best known for designing sixteen Carnegie libraries throughout southwestern Ontario. He opened his own office in Guelph in 1905 and operated under his own name until 1919, when he formed a partnership with Aaron Austin that lasted until 1931.

Designed in the Second Empire style with a hipped roof and tower topped with a steeply pitched hipped roof and three dormers, the expanded St. Agnes school towered over the Cork streetscape at the apex of the northern boundary of Catholic Hill. Though initially opened as a girl's school, St. Agnes would eventually become a co-ed institution that taught grades 1-3, while St. Stanislaus taught grades 4-8.

In the mid-twentieth century, St. Agnes School, St. Stanislaus School, the Loretto Academy, and Notre Dame High School were all located on Catholic Hill, fulfilling the vision of Bishop Farrell and Father Holzer for a Catholic educational campus atop the hill. However, in the later half of the twentieth century, the cost of maintaining small schools like St. Agnes and St. Stanislaus led to the closure of both schools. St. John Bosco Secondary School was constructed in 1986 on the former site of St. Stanislaus, continuing the tradition of Catholic education on the Hill.

St. Agnes School is a vital component of the Catholic Hill Cultural Heritage Landscape (CHL) identified in the City of Guelph [Cultural Heritage Action Plan](#). The prominent and intentional placement of St. Agnes, especially the tower, at the apex of the Cork Street Hill, its design by significant Guelph architects John Hall Jr. and William Mahoney, and its strong association with the Sisters of Loretto and the Guelph Catholic education system combine to give St. Agnes School significant cultural heritage value.

Building Description

St. Agnes School is a product of the combined works of two significant Guelph based architects, John Hall Jr. and William Mahoney. John Hall Jr. designed the first iteration of the building, a one-storey Neo-classical construction that opened in 1883. The building seen today represents the vision of William Mahoney, who added a second storey to Hall's 1883 construction, and designed the expanded St. Agnes School in the Second Empire Style, popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

St. Agnes School is a two-storey, five bay, limestone construction with a hipped roof and central tower capped by a steeply pitched hipped roof.

The tower functions as a frontispiece in the symmetrical facade containing a central entranceway at ground level flanked by two small windows, capped by large stone lentils. The tower is flanked on the main building façade by two entry doors that lead directly into the first floor of the main building. Above the entranceway is a datestone inscribed "St Agnes School 1883-1908," commemorating the school's two phases of construction. Above the datestone on the second storey are two tall rectangular windows, that are matched on the east and west sides of the tower. Stone dentils decorate the tower beneath the eaves of the roof. The steeply pitched roof once contained three gabled dormers and was capped by a wooden cross and metal cresting, all of which have been removed.

The main building sits on a limestone foundation punctuated by small rectangular windows beneath a band course of limestone. The facades on either side of the tower contain four windows on the first and second stories, grouped in three, with one solitary window near the corner of the building. All windows have limestone sills and lintels. Large stone quoins are found at all corners of the building.

The east and west elevations of the building are symmetrical with three tall rectangular windows, one central window flanked by two slightly wider windows of the same height. The rear elevation is punctuated by a central, 2.5-storey projecting gable with a distinctive circular window at the attic level. The projecting gable contains one doorway and one window on each storey, indicating a fire escape stairwell was once attached to the building in this location. Additionally, there is a doorway at the bottom of the frontispiece leading into the basement. The fenestration pattern on the rear façade is symmetrical, with three large window openings flanking the frontispiece on each storey.

Statement of Significance

The subject property is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act because it meets seven of the nine prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, according to Ontario Regulation 9/06 as amended by Ontario Regulation 569/22. The heritage attributes of 28 Norfolk Street display: design/physical, historical/associative, and contextual value.

Design/Physical Value

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 1, being of design or physical value, because it is a rare and representative example of the Second Empire style of Institutional architecture in the City of Guelph. It is also one of very few extant stone schools in the City of Guelph.

Historical/Associative Value

28 Norfolk Street meets criterion 4 because it has direct associations with Catholic education in the City of Guelph, specifically the provision of education by the Sisters of Loretto.

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 5 because it yields information that contributes to an understanding of the Guelph Catholic community and the development of the Catholic school system in Guelph.

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 6 because it reflects the works of John Hall Jr. and William Mahoney, two significant Guelph-based architects. The building represents one of Hall's last institutional commissions, and one of Mahoney's first.

Contextual Value

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 7 because the property is important in defining the character of the Cork streetscape and Catholic Hill Cultural Heritage Landscape.

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 8 because the property is functionally, visually, and historically linked to the Catholic Hill Cultural Heritage Landscape.

28 Norfolk Street meets Criterion 9 because the property is a highly visible and prominent landmark for the Guelph community. The school is located at the apex of Cork Street on Catholic Hill and can be viewed from as far away as Wyndham Street.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Current Photographs

Attachment-2 Historical Documents

Report Author

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