

Advisory Committee of Council Staff Report



To Heritage Guelph
Date Monday, July 8, 2024
Subject **37 Christie Lane: Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report and Designation Recommendation**

Recommendation

1. THAT the comments provided by Heritage Guelph members on the '37 Christie Lane: Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report' be provided to staff and Council for their consideration.
 2. THAT Heritage Guelph supports the heritage attributes identified for 37 Christie Lane as outlined in the staff report dated July 8, 2024; and
 3. THAT Heritage Guelph recommends that City Council give notice of its intention to designate 37 Christie Lane pursuant to Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act
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Executive Summary

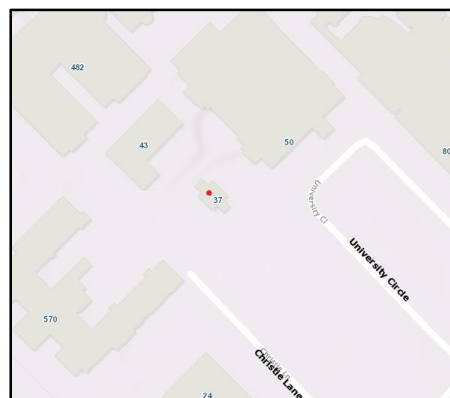
Purpose of Report

This report provides a cultural heritage evaluation and draft statement of significance and determination of cultural heritage value or interest for 37 Christie Lane. This report recommends that Heritage Guelph supports the proposed heritage attributes for 37 Christie Lane and that Heritage Guelph recommends that Council publish its intention to designate the glass conservatory at 37 Christie Lane pursuant to Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Location

37 Christie Lane is located on the University of Guelph campus, at the end of Christie Lane. The legal description is GUELPH CON 1 DIV G PT LOTS 3 TO 9 CON 2 DIV G PT LOTS 6 TO 9 PLAN 378 LOT 8 PT LOTS 5 TO 7; City of Guelph.

Figure 1: 37 Christie Lane (City of Guelph GIS)



Report

Historical Background

Conservatories, also known as greenhouses, orangeries, or hothouses, have been used for millennia as a means of providing warmth to extend the growing season of crops, or to provide protection to tropical plants in northern climates. The first account of a conservatory was recorded by Pliny the Elder in 30 A.D, when he wrote in his *Historia Naturalis* of the “specularia,” small glass greenhouses on wheels used by the gardeners of Emperor Tiberius to ensure a year-round supply of melons at the imperial villa on the island of Capri (*Historia Naturalis*, Book 19, 23:64). The modern conservatory building type emerged in the sixteenth century as citrus plants gained popularity in Northwestern European horticulture. Orangeries, as they were called, were the preserve of the very wealthy, who regarded them as a mark of their elevated social status.

In the early nineteenth century, increased public interest in horticulture coincided with industrial developments in the manufacture of glass and iron that dramatically lowered the cost of conservatory construction, and led to the proliferation of more elaborate and large-scale structures. It was during this period that the conservatory was defined as a unique architectural typology: “The conservatory is distinguished from the greenhouse by the circumstances of its affording protection only to the plants; whereas the latter is used for rearing them” (Papworth, 1818, p. 86). While most eighteenth-century conservatories were shaped like a shed or lean-to, horticulturist Sir George Mackenzie proposed in 1815 a form that was one-fourth of a sphere, or a semi-dome, supported by a wall. By 1851, the popularity of the conservatory was cemented by the construction of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition at Sydenham in England. Designed by gardener and architect Joseph Paxton, the gargantuan structure was a sensation, and greatly popularized the conservatory across Europe and North America in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Institutional and residential conservatories became popular in Ontario during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prominent examples include the 1910 Allan Garden Conservatory in Toronto, designed by Robert McCallum in the neoclassical style (now designated under [Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act](#)). The Rutherford Conservatory, as it is now known, was constructed in 1931 by Lord and Burnham Company, North America’s premier builders and designers of glass conservatories in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Founded in 1872 by Frederick Lord and his son-in-law Addison Burnham, the company grew to be the most prolific glasshouse manufacturer in North America. In 1877 the company was contracted to design a conservatory at the Golden Gate State Park in San Francisco, which still stands and is known as the [Conservatory of Flowers](#). From 1899-1903, Lord and Burnham built one of the firm’s most impressive structures, the [Enid A. Haupt Conservatory](#) at The New York Botanical Gardens. In the 1920s, a Canadian branch of the firm, the Lord & Burnham Company Ltd, was established in St. Catharines, Ontario to serve the Canadian market.

In the early 1930’s, the Ontario Agricultural College retained Lord and Burnham Co. Ltd. to design and build an ornate conservatory to function as a showpiece and formal entrance to the greenhouse complex used by the Department of Horticultural Science, housed in what is now the Hutt Building. Completed in 1931,

the structure expresses the orientalism typical in conservatory design of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, drawing influence primarily from Middle Eastern and South Asian architecture with its four centered ogee arches and faceted dome, topped by a cupola. Constructed of wrought iron and cypress wood, the structure sits on a limestone foundation composed of blocks salvaged from original Ontario Agricultural College barns (University of Guelph, 2024). According to the University of Guelph, the conservatory is one of the few remaining pagoda-like glass and cypress wood structures remaining in North America (University of Guelph, 1998, 1999).

Figure 2: Department of Horticulture Greenhouses c. 1939 (U of G Archives, REI OAC AO218)



The conservatory was not only an impressive centerpiece of the Ontario Agricultural College, and later University of Guelph campus, but has functioned as a popular meeting place for generations of students, faculty, and alumni. According to the University of Guelph, “older alumni also recall it as a popular spot at which to meet for moonlit rendezvous - with more than one marriage proposal having been uttered in its midst” (University of Guelph, 1998).

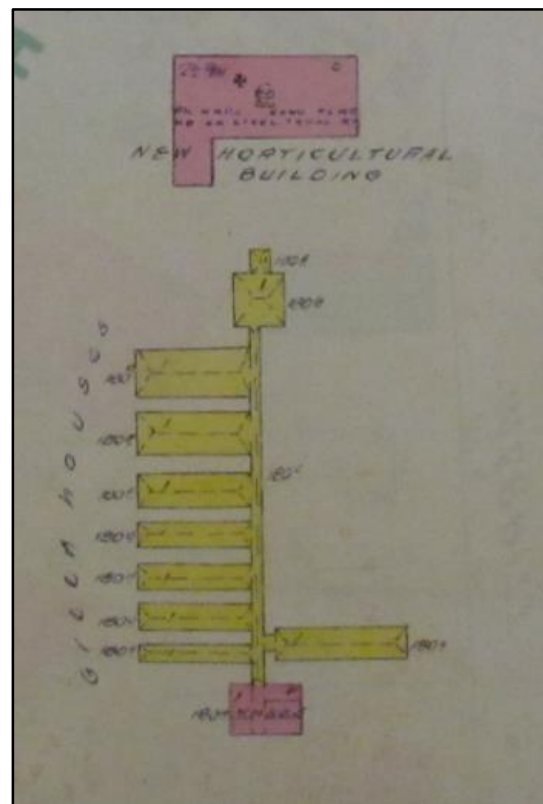
Figure 3: Arleen Young and Don Barnum in the Conservatory, 1939 (U of G Archives, RE1 UOG A1817)



In the early 1990s, the conservatory had fallen into disrepair and was threatened by demolition. In 1998, a group of alumni, faculty, students, and staff worked

together to raise funds for the restoration of the conservatory. A gift of \$256,000 from Don Rutherford, an Ontario Agricultural College alumnus, represented the funding required to restore the conservatory. According to Rutherford, "once fully restored to its previous glory, the conservatory greenhouse will be an ideal greeting and welcome spot for visitors and newcomers to the University, as well as old friends renewing their acquaintance" (University of Guelph, 1998). Restoration and relocation work was conducted in 1998-1999, and the renamed "Rutherford Conservatory" opened its doors on June 19. The restored conservatory was surrounded by six thematic gardens: spring, summer, fall, winter, water, and woodland.

Figure 4: Conservatory in 1946 Fire Insurance Plan



Architectural Description

The Rutherford Conservatory is a glass conservatory with a square footprint and faceted dome roof topped with a cupola. A front-gabled entryway, relocated from the north to the south elevation of the conservatory during restoration in the 1990s, protrudes from the south elevation. A stone dwarf wall runs along the perimeter of the building. The frame of the building is constructed of cypress wood with metal supports, with glazed walls and roof throughout. Transom windows run the length of the walls. Double doors on the east elevation exit into a gated garden with a pond. The floor is tiled with terra cotta, and the raised beds on the interior are constructed from limestone salvaged from demolished Ontario Agricultural College barns.

Figure 5: Rutherford Conservatory in 2006 (Guelph Public Library Archives, F70-0-2-0-0-12)



Statement of Significance

The conservatory at 37 Christie Lane is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act because it meets eight of the nine prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, according to Ontario Regulation 9/06 as amended by 569/22. The subject building at 37 Christie Lane has design and physical value, historical and associative value, and contextual value.

Design/Physical Value

The subject property meets criterion 1 because it is an extremely rare and unique example of a glass conservatory in the City of Guelph.

The subject property meets criterion 2 because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship in its cypress wood, glass, and metal construction.

Historical/Associative Value

The subject property meets criterion 4 because it has direct associations with the Ontario Agricultural College and the history of horticulture in the Province of Ontario. When constructed in 1931, the Conservatory functioned as the formal entrance to the Ontario Agricultural College's horticultural greenhouses.

The subject property meets criterion 5 because it yields information that contributes to an understanding of the Guelph student and faculty community. The Conservatory has historically functioned not only as a working greenhouse, but as a meeting place for students and faculty. It has formed the backdrop to countless graduation photographs and was the location of numerous wedding proposals.

The subject property meets criterion 6 because it demonstrates the work of Lord and Burnham Ltd., significant builders of greenhouses and conservatories in nineteenth and twentieth-century North America.

Contextual Value

The subject property meets criterion 7 because it is important in defining the character of the University of Guelph botanical gardens, which were designed around the Conservatory.

The subject property meets criterion 8 because it is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to the University of Guelph botanical gardens, a landscape designed around the conservatory building. The Conservatory is historically linked to the Hutt Building, formerly the Horticulture Building, which is located to the north of the conservatory.

The subject property meets criterion 9 because it is a landmark. The Conservatory occupies a location of visual prominence, and is well known amongst students, staff, faculty, alumni, and citizens of Guelph.

Heritage Attributes

The following elements of the property at 37 Christie Lane should be considered as heritage attributes in a designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act:

- The location of the Conservatory within the designed landscape of the botanical gardens
- The scale, form and massing of the single-storey structure
- The steel framing
- The walls, including wood, steel, and glass material
- The cyprus wood mullions and rafters
- The fenestration, with wood-framed windows, and transoms
- The iconic 4-sided glazed dome with curved trusses
- The square cupola, including the finial
- The vestibule, including the decorative arched window frame above the door

Attachments

Attachment-1 Current Photographs

Report Author

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