

**Ministry of Tourism,  
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**Conservation Review Board**

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**Commission des**

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**RE: TOWN OF OAKVILLE - INTENTION TO DESIGNATE  
40 COX DRIVE, OAKVILLE, ONTARIO**

Heather Broadbent, Vice-Chairman  
Barbara Humphreys, Member  
Conservation Review Board

November 23, 1994

The hearing was convened at 1225 Trafalgar Road, Town of Oakville on November 23, 1994, pursuant to section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Ch. 0.18, for the purpose of reporting to the Council of the Town of Oakville whether, in the opinion of the Conservation Review Board, on the basis of the evidence heard, the property known municipally as 40 Cox Drive, Oakville, should be designated by by-law under the Act.

Objections to Designation were submitted to the municipality by the owners, Jan and Violet Bielski.

Notice of the hearing was given under the Act in the *Oakville Beaver* newspaper on October 21 and 28, and November 4, 1994, by the Board, the relevant affidavit by a member of the Board's staff being Exhibit #1.

Prior to the meeting the members of the Board viewed the exterior of the property in question.

The Case for the Town of Oakville

Douglas Carr, Lawyer for the Town of Oakville, presented the case for the Town of Oakville. There were no objectors present. Mr. Carr tabled, as Exhibit #2, a Staff Report and motion from the LACAC on designation of the building. Entered as Exhibit #3, a certified copy of the motion to designate 40 Cox Drive from the Town of Oakville Council Minutes of January 18, 1993. Entered as Exhibit #4 was a report prepared for the Town of Oakville by Unterman McPhail Cuming Associates. Exhibit #5 is the proof of ownership of 40 Cox Drive, Oakville. Mr. Carr then called on the witness, Mr. Richard Unterman.

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### Other Presentations

Mr. Richard Unterman

Mr. Unterman, whose credentials appear in Exhibit 4 and is obviously well qualified, led the Board members through the very comprehensive report prepared by his firm. He pointed out that the Town of Oakville was well acquainted with the intention and operation of the Ontario Heritage Act, having already designated over 100 individual properties and 2 heritage districts. For designation, the Council must be assured that the property meets one or more of the following criteria:

- a) the building is associated with the life of a significant member of the community;
- b) the building has played a role in an important historic event;
- c) the building has architectural significance, value or interest due to building type, architectural style or period, or it is the work of an important architect or early builder;
- d) the building has contextual significance because of its position as an integral part of the surrounding landscape.

Mr. Unterman believed the Cox property met at least three of the four criteria and detailed his reasons for this assessment, which may be summarized as follows:

*Historical association:* with the Cox family who were prominent in Canadian business affairs;

*Architectural significance:* example of a recognized style, designed by a leading architectural firm;

*Contextual significance:* a rare example of the once numerous estate homes in the area and holding landmark status in the area.

Because of this assessment, he strongly supports the proposed designation of the property.

### Objections

An Objection was submitted to the Town by the owners through their lawyer, J. Bruce Gardner of Oakville. The owners simply appeared to be in disagreement with all of the reasons given by the LACAC in their recommendation for designation, i.e. that the Cox family is not of importance to the people of Oakville, that the house "does not reflect any architecturally accepted uniqueness or significance worthy of designation", and finally that the changes made to both the house and property are so extensive that "it would be a fraud to pass the place off as an example of original grandeur".

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## Findings

The Cox residence was built in 1910 on a 17 acre estate bordering on the shore of Lake Ontario. As well as the house and gardens, the estate originally included stables, farm buildings, a show arena and a large polo field. Following the deaths of the owners (Mr. Cox in 1947 and Mrs. Cox in 1948), the entire property was sold. The house and immediate grounds were retained and the balance of the land subdivided for housing. All that remains of the original estate then is the house and grounds, suggestions of the gardens, and sections of the six foot high, rough cast wall that once bordered the property along each side of Lakeshore Road.

Mr. Herbert Cox, the original owner, was the son of George A. Cox, a leading Canadian financier, President of the Canada Life Assurance Company, holder of some 50 directorships and involved in the development of numerous companies, and in 1896 became a Senator. Except for entering into politics, Herbert appears to have followed rather closely in his father's footsteps. He began his career with the Canada Life Assurance Company and, following a series of other appointments, became President of the company in 1914, a post he held until retirement in 1928 when he was then appointed Chairman of the Board. He also held a number of directorships in major companies such as Robert Simpson Co., Canadian General Electric, and the presidencies of such companies as the Imperial Guarantee and Accident Co., and The Toronto Savings and Loan Company. However, in 1924 he purchased an estate in England and thereafter spent the winters there pursuing his lifelong interest in horses, and returning to Canada only for the summer season.

The Cox mansion as originally built was a handsome, 2 1/2 storey end-gabled building of Neo-classic design. It was 9 bays wide with 4 gable dormers and chimneys inset behind the pedimented end-gables. Sometime after 1922, the house was enlarged by the addition of a 2 1/2 storey, 6 bay, 3 dormer gable-roofed addition to the east end and a 2 storey flat-roofed addition at the rear, running the full length of the enlarged main block. Small one storey sections have been added at each corner of the rear addition as well as a 4 bay garage. All additions have been carefully designed in both scale and detail to blend with the original, with the east extension being fully integrated presenting a uniform facade. There are a number of interesting details -- quarter circle windows in the west gable (the original one), small brackets under the cornice of the rear addition and a balustrade surmounting it, wide stone steps with decorative lanterns at the rear or lakefront entrance and a decorative glass and wrought iron structure shielding the west entrance. Shutters have been added to the lower windows of the front facade matching those of the upper units, their black finish contrasting sharply with the white stucco walls. All other trim is white.

The architectural style of the resultant building is a bit eclectic, with the Neoclassic style, popular in the mid 19th century, dominating the original building, whereas the rear addition is in the later Beaux Arts idiom of the early 20th century. However, the total result is a well integrated

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structure, very impressive in appearance if somewhat massive in size, and suggestive as it was meant to be, of the large plantation homes of the southern United States.

The original building was the work of the architectural firm of Sproatt and Rolph - designers of a number of notable buildings in Toronto, including The Royal York Hotel, and the Canada Life Assurance Building. Credit for the existing building must also be given to the designer (unnamed) of the carefully integrated additions.

### Conclusions

The Cox building is a very handsome structure and while the house has undergone numerous exterior additions and little remains to suggest either the size or development of the original grounds, both site and house are still very attractive. Hints of the original gardens remain and the lawn still sweeps down to the lakeshore. The building has been very well maintained and, although somewhat crowded now by encroaching houses of the adjacent subdivisions, it is still a very impressive landmark. In historical terms, it appears to be one of the few remaining estate houses erected during the early 20th century by those engaged - successfully - in the development of major Canadian companies.

No evidence was provided that would indicate that the Cox's contributed in any material way to the development of the Town of Oakville. However, the reputation of the estate with its internationally recognized polo grounds, and the major social activities centred there undoubtedly lent prestige to the Town and attracted further settlement.

### Recommendations

1. In view of its local significance as an example of the great estates which once bordered the shore of Lake Ontario, east and west of Oakville, that the building is a handsome example of work of a leading Canadian architectural firm and that it is in itself an impressive structure the Conservation Review Board recommends that the Town of Oakville proceed with the designation as originally planned.
2. The Board further recommends that the Oakville LACAC contact the owners and ensure that they understand that designation does not necessarily mean no further changes or alterations can ever be made but rather that it is designed to ensure that such alterations as may be required are carried out as carefully as has been done in the past in order to retain as much as possible of the heritage qualities of the building and to assist them in so doing.

(Signed)

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Heather Broadbent  
Vice-Chairman

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Barbara Humphreys  
Member

## List of Exhibits

### Exhibit #

1. Affidavit of Notice of Hearing.
2. A Staff Report and motion from the LACAC on designation of the building.
3. A certified copy of Item 19 of the Council Minutes of January 18, 1993, approving the designation of the subject property.
4. Report prepared by Unterman McPhail Cuming Associates.
5. Copy of Deed of Ownership.