



Conservation
Review Board

Ministry of Tourism,
Culture and Recreation

Commission des
biens culturels

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RE: CITY OF TORONTO - INTENTION TO DESIGNATE
62 LAING STREET (MAPLE COTTAGE)

M.E. Burnham, Member (Acting Chair)

William R. Young, Member

16 December 1991

HEARING pursuant to Section 29(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O 1990, chapter 0.18 concerning the Notice of Intention to Designate given by the Council of the City of Toronto to designate 62 Laing Street, known as Maple Cottage, to be of historic and architectural value or interest.

APPEARING FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO

John Phillips, Solicitor, City of Toronto

R E P O R T

The Board attended at City Hall, City of Toronto at 10: 00 a.m. on 16 December 1991 to conduct a public hearing to determine whether the property known as 62 Laing Street should be designated as being of historic and architectural value or interest.

The hearing proceeded on the basis that proper notice had been given (Exhibit 1).

FINDINGS OF FACT

Ownership: The registered owner of Part Lot 38 and lane to the north thereof, west side of Laing Street, Plan 214, City of Toronto is Conestoga Investments Limited by instrument number CA32673 of 15 June 1989 (Exhibit 5).

Notice: The City of Toronto filed with this Board:

a) a certified Copy of the appropriate resolution of the City Council (Exhibits 2 and 3);

b) an affidavit that the notice of Intention to designate had been published in the Toronto Sun (Exhibit 4).

Historic and Architectural Evidence:

Joan Elizabeth Crosbie, a preservation officer with the Toronto Historical Board, outlined the historical and architectural reasons that were included in the heritage property report that she had prepared and that was considered by the Council of the City of Toronto when Council adopted a resolution to designate the property (Exhibit 2).

The property proposed for designation contains both "Maple Cottage" and the maple tree that oral tradition credits with inspiring Alexander Muir to write "The Maple Leaf Forever".

The historical evidence that was presented to this Board contains some elements that may be documented and others that remain conjecture. Certainly, the historical importance of Alexander Muir and of "The Maple Leaf Forever" is well established.

The historical evidence regarding the significance of the maple tree is another matter. It rests on the undocumented belief that when he taught at the school at the corner of Curzon and Queen Streets, Muir walked by the tree and composed the song. This evidence appears to have been long-recognized as witnessed by a plaque that the Orange Lodge placed on the tree in the 1930s and replaced in 1959, as well as the recognition of the tree as significant by the Ontario Association of Foresters. This evidence is a recognition of the strength of the oral tradition though not necessarily of the place of this particular tree as Muir's inspiration.

The architectural evidence to support designation was presented by John J.G. Blumenson, Preservation Officer, Toronto Historical Board. He pointed out that the modest cottage represents a variant on the Ontario cottage style with a central gable. The 1873 structure, one of the earliest in the neighbourhood, is a rare example of early residential construction in the area. The house is a one-and-one-half storey frame and brick cottage on a raised foundation. On the facade, the doorway is flanked by large sash windows. These windows are also found in the north and south sides. A verandah runs the full length of the ground floor facade.

The original house, however, has been altered. The roofline was changed when the gable was truncated, much of the original detailing of the verandah has been removed; the sides were bricked some years after construction; the door was replaced. Two rear additions to the house were built one about 1900 and another later still. The fence was built sometime in the 1950s.

RECOMMENDATION

In assessing the evidence that was presented in favour of designation, this Board is aware that there are many gaps that cast some doubt on the historical testimony. For example, it is relevant to ask: Can the age of the maple tree be better established? What documentary evidence exists to prove the connection with Alexander Muir and the Leslieville neighbourhood? What are the precise sources of the oral tradition? What are the precise quotes from John Ross Robertson?

Are there any newspaper clippings or other evidence that may bolster the case? What inspired the Orange Lodge to put a plaque on the property in 1930? Are there minutes of Orange Lodge meetings that might cast some further light on the history of the tree?

At the same time, the Board notes that "Maple Cottage" was built after the tree allegedly inspired the song and, therefore, can have no historical significance in relation to Alexander Muir or "The Maple Leaf Forever."

This board is left with the conclusion that because the historical research is incomplete and the city's argument that the tree is historically significant may, or may not, be accurate.

As for the architectural evidence regarding "Maple Cottage" itself, the City of Toronto presented an unconvincing case in favour of designating the property on architectural grounds.

The major argument in favour of designation is the fact that the Toronto Historical Board recognized its heritage value by

placing it on the inventory of heritage properties over ten years ago on 10 September 1981, as a Class C property. According to the "Criteria for Heritage Properties" published by the Toronto Historical Board, Class C buildings "are vital reminders of a community's past".

As a Class C listing, the evidence of the property's historical importance in the community has been recognized by the Orange Lodge's plaques and by the Ontario Association of Foresters. Again, however, the City of Toronto might have strengthened this aspect of its argument by including more direct evidence of its importance in the community - both past and current.

The Conservation Review Board recommends designation of the property at 62 Laing Street as a property of historical value or interest.

(Original Signed by)

M.E. Burnham

William R. Young