

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



90 Centre Street East - William Graham House

1910

Part of Lot 47, Concession 1, Markham Township

Prepared by: Heritage & Urban Design, Planning & Building Services, 2024

History:

90 Centre Street East

The subject property at 90 Centre Street East originated as part of the 190-acre Lot 47, Concession 1, in Markham Township. It was patented from the Crown in 1802 by Andrew Davidson. All 190 acres of Lot 47 changed hands several times in the early 19th century, until Jabez Lynde sold the lot to Amos Wright in 1832. Wight was an important early figure in York County and Richmond Hill, and was the first reeve of Markham Township in 1850, and chairman of the 1857 meeting that supported the incorporation

of Richmond Hill as a village.¹ Wright began subdividing Lot 47 in 1832, and parcels were sold off for speculation or development through the 19th century. However, Lot 47 in Markham Township was much slower to develop than its counterpart on the west side of Yonge Street, in Vaughan Township, and early maps of the area show that there was only sparse development east of Yonge Street in the 19th century, largely concentrated along Yonge Street, Church Street North, and the westernmost portion of Centre Street East. In 1879, Gibson's Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill was registered, which laid out Village Lots 56 and 57 on the south side of Centre Street East (Figure 1).

Land Registry records indicate that in October of 1901, James M. Sanderson, executor of Henry Sanderson, sold Village Lots 56 and 57 (together comprising 6 acres of land) to William H. Pugsley for \$500. Pugsley then sold the west 60 feet of Lot 56 on the south side of Centre Street East to William Graham for \$200 in April of 1910. William Graham, who had just started his own contracting and construction business in the village, proceeded to build his first home on the subject property at 90 Centre Street East, which was completed in 1910.² A circa 1914 archival photograph of William Graham, his wife Amy, and their eldest child, Philip, outside their home at 90 Centre Street East reveals the original appearance of the dwelling, as well as the rural context along Centre Street East at the time. Graham and his family lived in the subject dwelling until 1916, when they sold the property to George Drury for \$2750, and relocated to a new home at 13 Church Street South.

George Drury then sold the subject property to Katherine W. Koonig for \$3700 in 1946, and the Koonigs sold the property to Nickolas and Hilary Purdue for \$7000 in 1951.

William Graham

Prolific Richmond Hill builder William H. Graham was born on a farm in York Mills on December 25, 1881. Graham moved to Richmond Hill in 1900, when his parents took up farming on the east side of Yonge Street, around present-day Crosby Avenue. After initially working in construction under Mr. William Mackenzie, he started his own contracting and building company in the village in 1910. In 1911, Graham married Amy Gertrude Phillips, and the couple moved into the frame home at 90 Centre Street East built by William the year before. In 1916, the Grahams moved to their second home built by William at 13 Church Street South. The couple had four children together: Philip James (1912), Marjorie Jane (1915), Wallace William (1918), and George Alexander (1919).³ Land Registry records for Lot 47 of Markham Township indicate that Graham bought a substantial amount of vacant land on Centre Street East and Church Street South during the 1910s and 1920s, which he subdivided, developed, and then resold to accommodate the village's rapid growth resulting from the booming flower industry during this time. As a testament to the influence that Graham had on the growing village

¹ Stamp, *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930* (Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991), 158.

² "Locals," *Liberal*. Jun 10, 1910.

³ Graham, "Biography of William H. Graham & Buildings Constructed by William H. Graham Builder and Contractor: 1909-1924." Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection, 1972.

in the early 20th century, the William H. Graham Parkette now stands at 43 Church Street South.

William Graham entered the Masonic Order in 1914, and quickly rose through the ranks, becoming Junior Warden. William Graham died unexpectedly from heart failure on January 16, 1924 at the early age of 42. During his relatively short time as a land developer and builder in the boom years of Richmond Hill's flower industry of the 1910s and 1920s, he constructed many public buildings, as well as around 30 homes in the village.⁴ As a whole, Graham's buildings reflect the restrained Edwardian Classicism and Foursquare architectural styles popular in the early 20th century, and have made an enduring impact on the built form character of Richmond Hill village, particularly on streets that were largely built out in the 1910s and 1920s, including Centre Street East, Church Street South, Roseview Avenue, and Arnold Crescent. When Graham died in 1924, he had just been awarded the \$100,000 contract to build the new high school on Wright Street, a project that he was never able to complete.⁵

Existing buildings in Richmond Hill attributed to William Graham include the William Pugsley House at 18 Arnold Crescent (1914), the Herbert H. Hopper House at 26 Arnold Cres (1914); the Mrs. Fred Lynett House at 27 Arnold Cres (c. 1915); the Lewis Doner House at 42 Arnold Cres (c. 1913); the William Hord House at 48 Centre Street East (c. 1920); the George Glenn House at 58 Centre Street East (1921); the Joseph H. Hall House at 59 Centre Street East (1913); the John B. Hickson House at 75 Centre Street East (c. 1910); the George Gee House at 92 Centre Street East (c. 1919); the William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East (1910); the Magdalene Klinck House at 75 Centre Street East (1914); the William Graham House at 13 Church Street South (1917); the James Dixon House at 85 Church Street South (c. 1924); the William C. Savage House at 91 Church Street South (c. 1921); the Herbert Jackson House at 67 Roseview Avenue (1915); the M. L. McConaghy Public School at 10100 Yonge Street (1914); the Standard Bank of Canada at 10111 Yonge Street (1915); the Loyal True Blue & Orange Home at 11181 Yonge Street (c. 1921); and the J. H. C. Durham Cobblestone Cottage at 12761 Yonge Street (c. 1922).

Architecture:

Dating to 1910, the William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East is a representative example of Edwardian Foursquare residential architecture in Richmond Hill. The Foursquare architectural style, which gained popularity in the first decades of the 20th century, is often considered a subtype of Edwardian Classicism architecture, as it features simple, balanced geometric forms (typically, cubed bases topped by pyramidal roofs) and incorporates restrained classical details such as pediments, friezes, dentils, cornices, and large porches on classical columns.

The dwelling at 90 Centre Street East is a 2 ½-storey frame building with a rectangular plan and a hipped roof with dormers. The building features a concrete base and wooden clapboard siding and corner boards, and flat-headed windows and doors with wood

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

surrounds. While most of the building's windows are currently flanked by shutters, these are not original.

The subject building's principal (north) elevation features a symmetrical two-bay composition. The house's main entrance is raised, and is sheltered by a front porch spanning the width of the north elevation, which is shed-roofed with bell-cast pent eaves. The front porch features wooden railings with square balusters, and is supported by tapered Tuscan columns on buff-brick bases, topped by a plain architrave and dentiled cornice.

The house's hipped roof features hipped dormers on its north, east and west sides, as well as a dentiled cornice below the eaves.

The house also features a sympathetic rear addition, which appears to have been built between 1999 and 2002, based on historical aerial photography.

Context:

The William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East is located on the south side of Centre Street East, between Church Street South and Pugsley Avenue. This part of Centre Street East, along with other streets east of Yonge Street including Church Street South and Roseview Avenue, were largely subdivided and developed in the early 20th century, and now feature a cohesive early 20th century residential character.

Directly west of the subject property there is an access pathway leading to the Richmond Hill Lawn Bowling Club property, which is located to the southwest. Town Park is located directly south of the subject property.

Compliance with Ontario Regulation 9/06 – Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest:

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06, the prescribed provincial *Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest* under Part IV, Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. There are a total of nine criteria under O. Reg. 9/06. A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets two or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

Criteria applicable to the property are outlined below, along with explanatory text.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method.

Dating to 1910, the William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East is a representative example of Edwardian Foursquare residential architecture in Richmond Hill. The building has retained many of its original architectural details expressing the Edwardian Foursquare style, including its simple rectangular plan and massing, hipped roof with a dentiled cornice and central dormer, wooden clapboard cladding, the balanced two-bay composition of the front facade, flat-headed windows and doors, and the raised main

entrance sheltered by a shed-roofed front porch with bell-cast pent eaves supported by a dentiled cornice and tapered Tuscan columns on buff-brick bases.

2. The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.

N/A

3. The property has design value or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.

N/A

4. The property has historical value or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community.

The William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East has historical value for its direct association with significant Richmond Hill developer and builder William Graham, who built the subject building as his first home in 1910 and resided there with his family until 1916. William H. Graham started his own contracting and building company in Richmond Hill in 1910, and bought a substantial amount of vacant land on Centre Street East and Church Street South during the 1910s and 1920s, which he subdivided, developed, and then resold to accommodate the village's rapid growth resulting from the booming flower industry during this time. During his relatively short time as a land developer and builder in the boom years of Richmond Hill's flower industry of the 1910s and 1920s, he constructed many public buildings, as well as around 30 homes in the village. As a testament to the influence that Graham had on the growing village in the early 20th century, the William H. Graham Parkette now stands at 43 Church Street South.

5. The property has historical value or associative value because it yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture.

N/A

6. The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.

The William Graham House also has historical value because its Edwardian Foursquare design reflects the work of prolific Richmond Hill builder William Graham during a period of rapid growth in the village as a result of the booming flower industry during the 1910s and 1920s. Residential and institutional buildings constructed by Graham generally reflect the restrained Edwardian Classicism and Foursquare architectural styles popular in the early 20th century, and have made an enduring impact on the built form character of Richmond Hill village, particularly on residential streets that were largely built out in the

1910s and 1920s, including Centre Street East, Church Street South, Roseview Avenue, and Arnold Crescent.

Other buildings in Richmond Hill attributed to William Graham include the M. L. McConaghy Public School at 10100 Yonge Street (1914); the Standard Bank of Canada at 10111 Yonge Street (1915); the Loyal True Blue & Orange Home at 11181 Yonge Street (c. 1921); the Herbert H. Hopper House at 26 Arnold Cres (1914); the William Pugsley House at 18 Arnold Crescent (1914); the Mrs. Fred Lynett House at 27 Arnold Cres (c. 1915); the Lewis Doner House at 42 Arnold Cres (c. 1913); the William Hord House at 48 Centre Street East (c. 1920); the George Glenn House at 58 Centre Street East (1921); the Joseph H. Hall House at 59 Centre Street East (1913); the John B. Hickson House at 75 Centre Street East (c. 1910); the George Gee House at 92 Centre Street East (c. 1919); the Magdalene Klinck House at 75 Centre Street East (1914); the William Graham House at 13 Church Street South (1917); the James Dixon House at 85 Church Street South (c. 1924); the William C. Savage House at 91 Church Street South (c. 1921); and the Herbert Jackson House at 67 Roseview Avenue (1915).

7. The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.

The William Graham House at 90 Centre Street East has contextual value because its scale, form, and Edwardian Foursquare architectural style are important in defining and maintaining the cohesive, fine-grained early-20th century residential character of the surrounding streetscape on Centre Street East, as well as that of the surrounding residential area east of Yonge Street and north of Major Mackenzie Drive, which was largely developed in the early 20th century.

8. The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.

N/A

9. The property has contextual value because it is a landmark.

N/A

Maps and Photographs

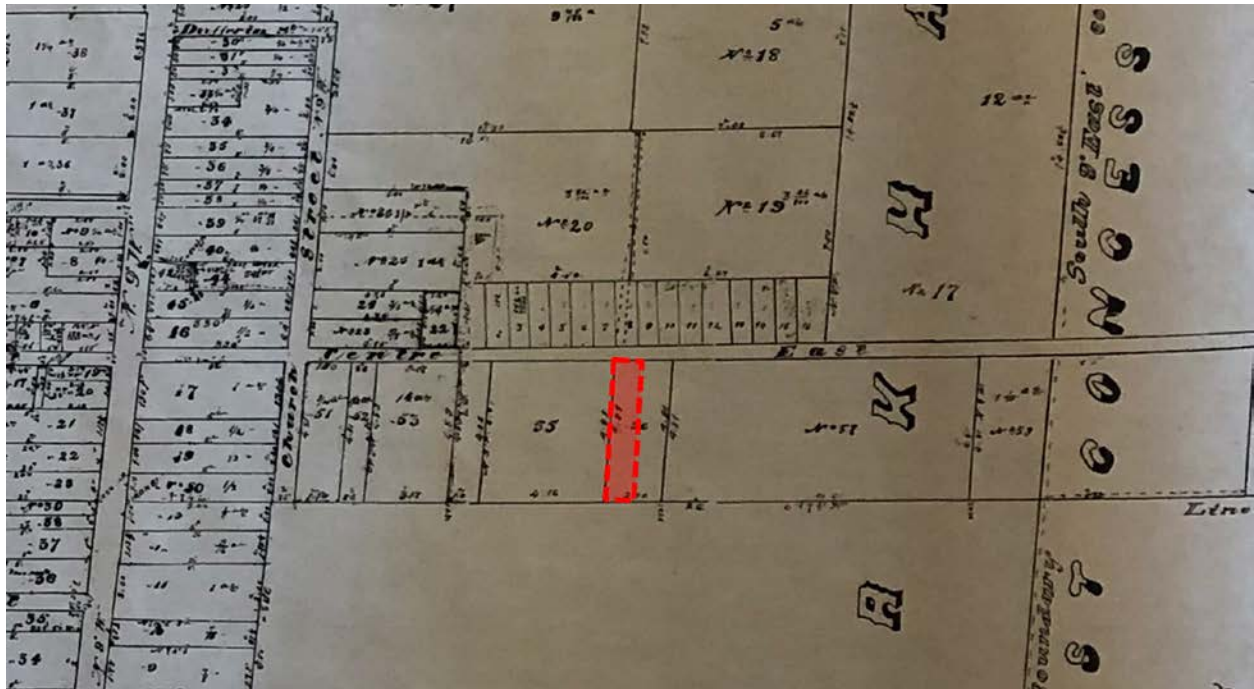


Figure 1 Detail of the 1879 Gibson Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill, with the approximate location of the subject property at 90 Centre Street East shown in red, comprising the west part of Village Lot 56 (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).



Figure 2 C. 1914 photograph of the Graham family outside their first home at 90 Centre Street East. Mrs. Amy Graham is sitting on the steps while her husband and eldest child, Philip, sit in their new 1914 Model-T Ford (Source: *Early Days in Richmond Hill*).

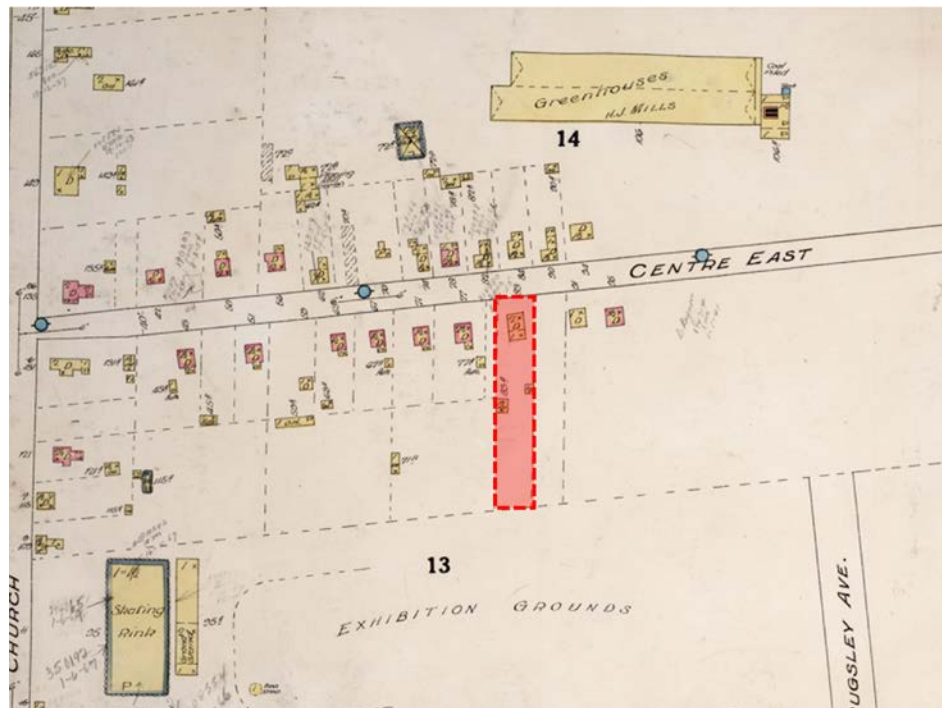


Figure 3 Detail of the 1923 *Underwriter's Survey Bureau Limited Fire Insurance Plan of Richmond Hill*, with the approximate location of the subject property at 90 Centre Street East in red. Note H. J Mills greenhouses to the north, and the Exhibition Grounds (now Town Park) to the south (Source: University of Toronto Library).



Figure 4 Photograph of the William Graham House's front (north) elevation, looking south from Centre Street East (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 5 Photograph of the William Graham House's front (north) elevation and side (west) elevation, looking southeast from Centre Street East. Note the sympathetic rear addition on the right (Source: HUD, 2023).

Sources:

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