

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



32 Richmond Street - William Harrison Rental House

1881

Part of Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township

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

History:

32 Richmond Street

The property at 32 Richmond Street originated as part of Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township. The subject property is located on the south side of Richmond Street, between Yonge and Elizabeth Streets, and within the boundaries of the historic village of Richmond Hill.

Land Registry records indicate that the 210-acre Lot 47 was first patented from the Crown in 1808 by John E. Stooks. In 1810, Lot 47 was sold to D'Arcy and Henry J. Boulton, who were members of one of York's elite families. The property was then acquired by David Bridgeford in 1818. Beginning in the 1820s, the property was

subdivided into smaller building lots and sold for development or speculation. In 1879, Gibson's Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill was registered, which laid out Village Lot 13 on the east side of Elizabeth Street North, between Centre and Richmond Streets (Figure 1).

In November 1879, Henrietta and William Snowden sold the northern half of Village Lot 13 on Lot 47, identified in Land Registry records as "Pt. 72/100 acres, Richmond Street", to William Harrison for \$500.¹ William Harrison then subdivided this property into three smaller lots, today known as 17 Elizabeth Street North, 32 Richmond Street, and 42 Richmond Street West, which he developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for income purposes. As these lots were located at the southeast corner of Richmond and Elizabeth Streets, the area became known as "Harrison's Corner."

William Harrison constructed the existing house at 32 Richmond Street in the Gothic Revival architectural style in 1881.² It appears that Harrison used the house as an income/rental property during the 1880s and 1890s.³ In 1900, Harrison sold the property to John Bestard, a retired farmer from Markham, for \$1800. John Bestard lived at the home until his death in 1912,⁴ at which point the property was bought by his daughter, Martha Williams, for \$2700. A review of census records indicates that Martha Williams resided in Markham throughout her life, and rented out the house at 32 Richmond Street to various tenants. Martha Williams granted the house to her daughter, Mary A. Stoutenburgh, in 1941.

William Harrison

William Harrison was born in the city of Bath, England on May 10, 1834. In 1842, his father John S. Harrison and mother Martha Harrison brought their family to Canada and settled on a farm two miles north of Richmond Hill. William established a saddle- and harness-making business in Richmond Hill in 1856, which operated until 1908.⁵ Harrison's business and home were located on Village Lot 7, on the west side of Yonge Street between Centre and Richmond Streets, and in close proximity to the subject property at 32 Richmond Street. William Harrison married Christina Whelpton in 1867, and they had four children, Clara, Luisa, Martha, and Frederick.⁶

William Harrison was a significant member of the Richmond Hill community in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and greatly contributed to the village's social development during his lifetime. Apart from running a successful harness-making business, he held leadership roles with the Methodist Church and Temperance Movement, and assisted in the organization of the first village fire brigade in 1856.

¹ Ontario Land Registry Abstract/Parcel Register Book, York Region, Concession 1, Lot 47, Vaughan Township (Richmond Hill).

² Richmond Hill Local Architectural Advisory Committee (LACAC). "Heritage Building Summary – 32 Richmond Street." Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection, date Unknown.

³ "Locals," *Liberal*. Sep 6, 1888.

⁴ "In Memoriam," *Liberal*. Jun 6, 1912.

⁵ "Late William Harrison – Noted Local Historian," *Liberal*. Jan 26, 1956.

⁶ Ibid.

An investor in Richmond Hill's first local newspaper, *The York Ridings Gazette* (later becoming *The Liberal*), he also served as a contributor in editorials and correspondence. In 1858, he contributed to a series of letters regarding free public education, believed to have directly catalysed Richmond Hill being one of the earliest villages in Ontario to offer free public education.⁷ Harrison was also appointed auditor of the Board of Education in 1868 and 1870.⁸ William Harrison is also known as Richmond Hill's first historian, having written a series of newspaper articles on Richmond Hill's pioneers and early settlement.

In 1866, William founded the Richmond Hill Mechanic's Institute and Literary Society, which later became the Public Library in 1870, and boasted a library of over 5,000 volumes. William also played a significant role in the efforts to incorporate Richmond Hill as a village in 1873. Held to such esteem by the community, he was nominated for the office of the first reeve. Although William initially refused nomination for the position, he was nominated and elected as the village's second reeve in 1874.

Architecture:

Dating to 1881, the William Harrison Rental House at 32 Richmond Street is a good representative example of late-Victorian Gothic Revival architecture in Richmond Hill.

The dwelling at 32 Richmond Street is a 1 ½-storey, buff brick-veneered building with an L-shaped plan. The house is oriented to the north, and features a cross-gabled roof with steeply-pitched north, east and west gable-ends featuring decorative gingerbread bargeboard trim.

The subject building is clad in buff brick laid in stretcher bond, with decorative masonry detailing in red-stained brick visible on its principal (north) and side (east and west) elevations. This stained-brick detailing includes a projecting building base, stringcourses, quoins, radiating voussoirs, and decorative banding.

The building features segmental-arched windows at the first storey, with radiating brick voussoirs, wooden lugsills, and period wood window units in a two-over-two configuration. Second-storey windows are gothic-arched, with radiating brick voussoirs, wooden lugsills, and period wood window units with Y-shaped tracery. The second-storey gothic-arched window above the hip-roofed verandah in the building's ell also features a small gothic-arched window with period wooden shutters.

The first storey of the building's principal (north) elevation features a hip-roofed projecting bay with gingerbread trim at the eaves. The house's main entrance is raised and located within the building's ell; it features a doorcase with a paneled wooden door and sidelights. The main entrance is also sheltered by a hip-roofed verandah, on turned wooden posts.

⁷ "Death of Wm. Harrison," *Liberal*. Mar 9, 1922

⁸ "Late William Harrison – Noted Local Historian," *Liberal*. Jan 26, 1956.

Context:

The William Harrison Rental House at 32 Richmond Street is located on the south side of Richmond Street, west of Yonge Street and within the boundaries of the historic village of Richmond Hill.

The subject property's scale, form, material palette and Victorian architectural style define, support and maintain the fine-grained late-19th and early-20th century residential character of both Richmond and Elizabeth Streets to the west of the subject property. Surrounding residential buildings on Richmond and Elizabeth Streets that contribute to the historical character of the streetscape include the Clara Harrison Rental House at 42 Richmond Street (c. 1875), the William Harrison Speculative House at 17 Elizabeth Street North (1885), the Burton F. Caldwell House at 16 Elizabeth Street North (1912), the Klinck-Redditt House at 24 Elizabeth Street North (c. 1923), and Maple Villa at 55 Richmond Street (c. 1837).

As part of a collection of three properties comprising "Harrison's Corner" at the intersection of Richmond and Elizabeth Streets, the subject property is also visually, functionally and historically linked to its surroundings. Other properties in "Harrison's Corner" include the Clara Harrison Rental House at 42 Richmond Street (c. 1875), and the William Harrison Speculative House at 17 Elizabeth Street North (1885). The subject property has a particularly strong contextual link to the Part IV Designated "William Harrison Speculative House" at 17 Elizabeth Street North to the southwest, expressed through a similarity of materials, style, and form.

The subject property also features a substantial side yard to the west of the dwelling. This side yard, featuring open green space and mature trees, also contributes to the historic village character of the surrounding context.

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 1881, the William Harrison Rental House at 32 Richmond Street has design and physical value as a good representative example of late-Victorian Ontario Gothic Revival architecture in Richmond Hill. The building has retained its original scale, form, massing and orientation on the south side of Richmond Street. The building also retains many original architectural details that are representative of the Ontario Gothic Revival

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style including an asymmetrical floor plan, steeply pitched cross-gabled roof with gingerbread bargeboard trim, decorative dichromatic brick-work, and gothic-arched windows with original wooden window units featuring decorative tracery.

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

The William Harrison Rental House also has design and physical value for the high degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit displayed in a number of its features, including its elaborate dichromatic patterned brickwork featuring red brick quoining, decorative and plain stringcourses, gingerbread bargeboard trim, and original wood window units with Y-shaped tracery.

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 Harrison Rental House has historical value for its direct association with William Harrison. Harrison was Richmond Hill's second reeve, owner and operator of a significant saddle-and-harness-making business, and one of the village's first local historians. William Harrison built the dwelling in 1881, and rented it out as an income property for nearly 20 years. As a local business owner and active citizen involved in establishing and leading many of the village's early organizations and societies, William Harrison was a significant member of the community who contributed to the development of Richmond Hill in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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.

N/A

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

The William Harrison Rental House has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining, and supporting the fine-grained late-19th and early-20th century

residential character of both Richmond and Elizabeth Streets, and the historical character of Richmond Hill's village core more broadly.

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

The William Harrison Rental House also has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings within "Harrison's Corner," a cluster of buildings located at the southeast corner of Richmond and Elizabeth Streets owned by William Harrison in the late 19th century. Other surviving properties in "Harrison's Corner" include the adjacent Clara Harrison Rental House at 42 Richmond Street (c. 1875), as well as the William Harrison Speculative House at 17 Elizabeth Street North (1885), with which it shares a particularly strong contextual link, expressed through a similarity of materials, style, and form.

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

N/A

Maps and Photographs

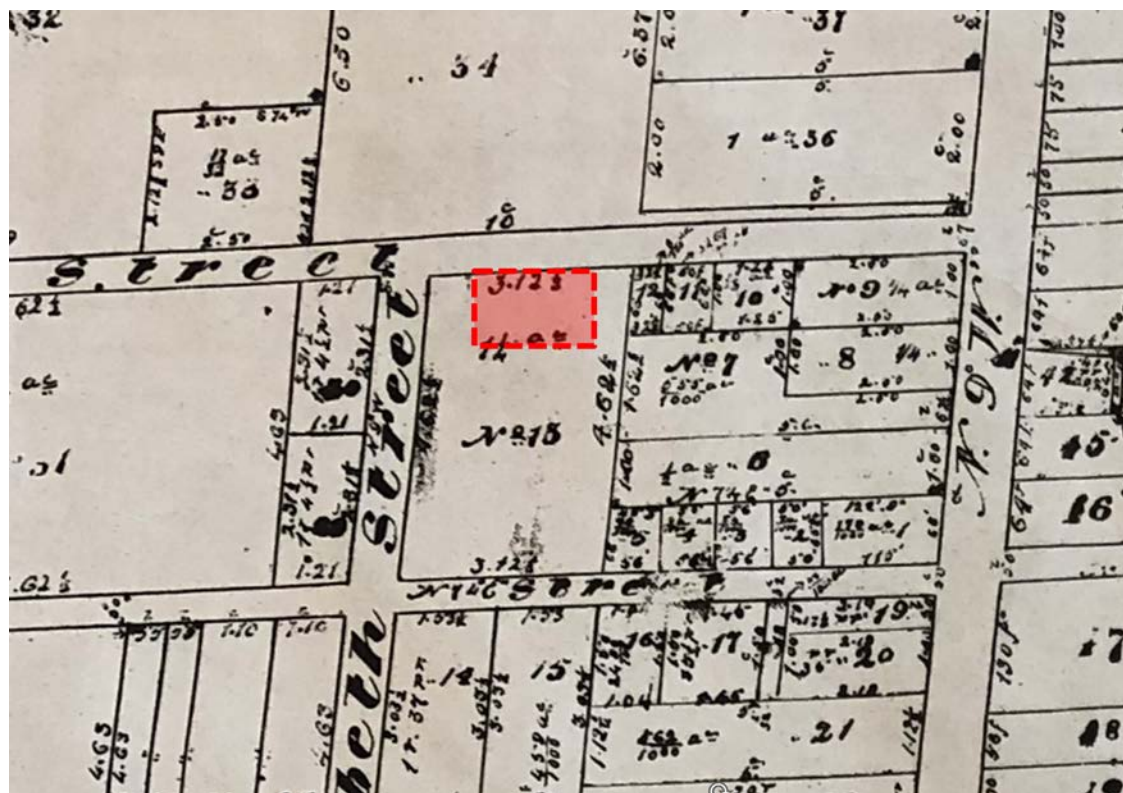


Figure 1 Detail of Gibson's Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill, 1879, indicating the approximate location of 32 Richmond Street within the northern portion of Village Lot 13 in red (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).



Figure 2 Photograph of William Harrison and his wife Christina (Whelpton) Harrison. Unknown Date (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection)

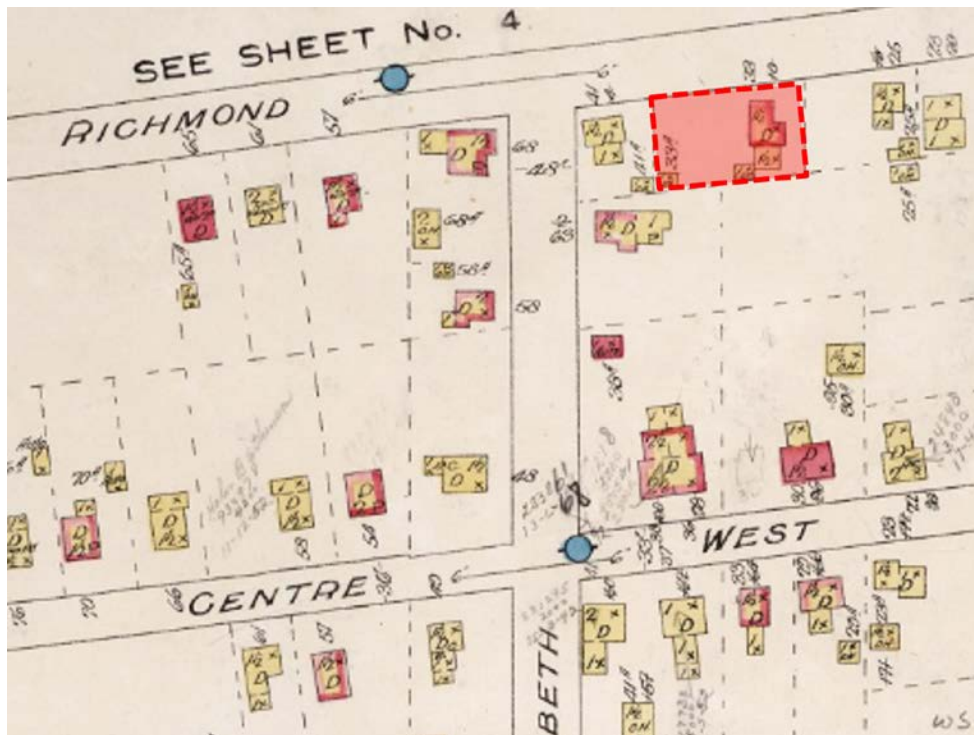


Figure 3 Detail of the 1923 Underwriter's Survey Bureau Limited Fire Insurance Plan of Richmond Hill, with the approximate location of the property at 32 Richmond Street indicated in red. (Source: University of Toronto Library)



Figure 4 1964 photograph showing 32 Richmond Street's west (side) elevation (Source: Richmond Hill LACAC "Heritage Building Summary – 32 Richmond Street.").



Figure 5 1980s photograph showing 32 Richmond Street's front (north) elevation. Note the original wooden front porch in the building's ell. (Source: Richmond Hill LACAC, "Heritage Building Summary – 32 Richmond Street.").



Figure 6 Current Photograph of 32 Richmond Street's front (north) elevation. Note the buildings L-shaped plan, steeply-pitched cross-gabled roof, gingerbread trim, dichromatic brickwork, hipped-roof porch, and gothic arched windows with Y-shaped tracery. (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 7 Current Photograph of 32 Richmond Street's side (west) elevation. (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 8 Current Photograph of 32 Richmond Street's side (east) elevation. (Source: HUD, 2023).

Sources:

Archival Sources

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