

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



13076 Leslie Street - George Sproxton House

c. 1853

Part Lot 6, Concession 2, Whitchurch Township

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

History:

Whitchurch Township and Oak Ridges

Whitchurch Township was originally located in the District of Nassau, which contained all the lands north of Lake Ontario from the Bay of Quinte to Long Point near Lake Erie. Upper Canada was created by the Constitutional Act in 1791, and in 1792 Sir John Graves Simcoe was appointed as the Governor Lieutenant-General. Simcoe quickly renamed the four districts of Upper Canada, with Nassau becoming 'Home District.' Simcoe also divided Upper Canada into 19 counties, one being York. York County consisted of ten townships, including Whitchurch, which was named in honour of the village of Whitchurch, Herefordshire in England, where John Graves Simcoe's wife, Elizabeth, was born. The Home District was altered when Toronto was incorporated as a city in 1834 and excluded from York County. York was further separated into two ridings, east and west, with Whitchurch falling in the east riding.¹

¹ Barkey, Jean. *Whitchurch Township*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1993.

Settlers began to arrive in Whitchurch as early as 1794. The first surveyor was John Stegman, who began his survey in 1800 and completed it in 1802. Each concession was divided into 200 acre lots extending from one concession road to the next. The first patent for land in the township was granted in 1796 to Joseph Bouchette. Frederic Smith, Charles Fathers, and James Pitney received their grants in the following year. In 1798 William Bond, John Chisolm, and Capt. W. Graham, who held 3000 acres, came to Whitchurch.²

Settlements in Whitchurch were clustered around waterways, fertile lands, and timber resources. As the community developed, amenities such as mills, churches, schools, general stores, and a post offices were eventually founded. By 1804, the Stouffer and Reesor families had arrived from Pennsylvania and settled in the area, and the first post office in Whitchurch was established by the federal government in 1832. In 1850, following the implementation of the Baldwin Act, the Township of Whitchurch became an organized municipal government body, with several hamlets absorbed into this newly formed township.³

One such hamlet was Oak Ridges, a settlement spanning both sides of Yonge Street, north of Stouffville Road, located within the Oak Ridges Moraine area. Due to the area's natural topography and features, the community of Oak Ridges is peppered with many small kettle lakes, such as Bond Lake, Wilcox Lake, St. George Lake, and Hayes Lake. The Oak Ridges area was originally settled as "Whindham" by about 40 French royalists (supporters of Louis XIV) fleeing the revolution in 1789.⁴ However, these aristocrats were ill equipped for the harsh realities of settler life in Upper Canada, and the settlement was abandoned by 1806.

A second wave of settlement began in Oak Ridges after the conditions of Yonge Street were improved in the 1830s, allowing stagecoach travel. Development of the community was gradual, with the Bond Lake hotel erected in 1834 on the west side of the lake, followed by a general store in 1846, the Anglican St. John the Baptist Church on Yonge Street in 1848, the hamlet's first post office in 1851, and the first Oak Ridges school in 1854.⁵ While the majority of Oak Ridges' early settlers were farmers and homesteaders, the area's picturesque setting in the Oak Ridges Moraine also made it an attractive country retreat for many elite Upper Canadian families. French aristocrat Henri Quetton St. George built his estate, Glen Lonely, in Oak Ridges between 1852 and 1860, and prominent families such as the Baldwins, Boultons, Robinsons, McLeods and Irwins has country estates in the area in the mid-19th-century.⁶

The Oak Ridges area remained part of the Township of Whitchurch until the creation of the Regional Municipality of York in 1971, when it became part of Richmond Hill.⁷

² Ibid.

³ "Our History - Stouffville." Town of Stouffville.

⁴ Barkey, Jean. *Whitchurch Township*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1993; 36.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

13076 Leslie Street

The property at 13076 Leslie Street originated as part of Lot 6, Concession 2, in Whitchurch Township. All 200 acres of Lot 6 was patented from the Crown in 1825 by King's College. George Sproxton purchased the east half (100 acres) of Lot 6 in 1853 (Registered 1875) for £628.⁸ However, it appears that the Sproxton family resided on Lot 6 before buying the property in 1853, as Rowsell's *City of Toronto and County of York Directory* for 1850-1851 lists John Sproxton as a farmer on Lot 6, Concession 2 of Whitchurch Township as early as 1850. It is unknown whether John Sproxton is a relative of George Sproxton, or a misprint in the directory. It is likely that the subject dwelling dates to around 1853, when Sproxton formally bought the property from King's College.

By the time of the 1861 Census, farmer George Sproxton (57), his wife Elizabeth (37), and their children, Matilda (21), Margret (17), Joseph (12), and Albert (2), are recorded as living in the subject dwelling, described in the census as a 1 ½-storey brick house in Whitchurch. Matilda Sproxton's husband Alfred Lawson (25), and daughter Elizabeth (1) are also recorded as living in the house at the time. The location of the subject dwelling within Sproxton's property is also shown in the 1860 Tremaine's Map of the County of York (Figure 1).

Land Registry records indicate that in 1892 George Sproxton's son Albert, who had inherited the property following his father's death in 1883, took out a mortgage for \$1300 on the property from Horace R. Allen. Albert then granted all 100 acres to Allen for \$1 in 1897. The 100-acre property was then purchased in 1908 by Mabel French for \$6,100. French severed a 5-acre portion of the property located at the northwest corner of Leslie Street and Bethesda Sideroad, and sold this parcel to Ernest N. Harvey in 1915 for \$1000. French then sold the remaining 95 acres of the property, including the George Sproxton House, to James Jones for \$7,000 in 1919.

Jones then sold the property to William A. Thomas for \$7,150 in 1926, and Thomas resold the property to Warren Graves for \$6,500 three years later in 1929. The property was then granted to Henry Bellisle, Joseph Muckle, William Ronch, Basil Sullivan, Edmund McCockell, and James Walsh for \$1 in 1932, and then resold to 'The Collegium of the University of St. Michael's College' for \$1 in 1958. The Toronto Muslim Cemetery Corporation acquired the subject property in 2010.

George Sproxton

George Sproxton was born in Hutton Cranswick, Yorkshire, England, in 1804 to Matthew Sproxton and Mercy Holiday.⁹ George immigrated to Canada at some point between 1804 and 1839, when he is recorded as marrying Elizabeth Seward in Aurora. Elizabeth gave birth to at least ten children prior to her death in 1868, six of whom died in childhood.¹⁰

⁸ *Ontario Land Registry Abstract/Parcel Register Book*, York Region, Lot 6, Concession 2, Whitchurch Township.

⁹ MHBC Planning. (2019). *Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report: 13076 Leslie Street*. City of Richmond Hill.

¹⁰ Ibid.

According to Land Registry records, George Sproxton bought the subject property, originally the east 100 acres of Lot 6, Concession 2 of Whitchurch Township, from King's College in 1853. While the Sproxton family appears to have resided on the property as early as 1850,¹¹ the subject dwelling likely dates to around 1853, following Sproxton's formal acquisition of the property.

George Sproxton was an early settler and farmer in Whitchurch, and his name appears as the owner of the east 100 acres of Lot 6, Concession 2 of Whitchurch Township in Tremaine's 1860 *Map of the County of York* (Figure 1). This map also indicates that the small lake directly north of the subject property (now called Haynes Lake) was known as Sproxton Lake at the time, while Henry Quetton St. George's Glen Lonely property and St. George Lake are located to the west and north of Sproxton's property.

The 1861 agricultural census provides further details about the agricultural activity on Sproxton's property at the time. The census records that in 1860, Sproxton had 47 acres under crops, 17 acres under pasture, 1 ½-acres under orchard or garden, and 38 acres under wood or wild. The crops farmed on his property included both fall and spring wheat, barley, peas, oats, potatoes, turnips, and hay.

According to the 1871 census, George is noted as a widower who continues to be listed as a resident of Whitchurch Township, living with his children Margaret, Elizabeth, Albert, Joseph, and Eliza as well as a labourer named Solomon. The 1879 Illustrated County Atlas Map of Whitchurch Township continues to identify George Sproxton as the owner of the east half of Lot 6, Concession 2 (Figure 2). George and his children Albert, Nancy, and George (junior) continue to be listed in the 1881 census as residents of Whitchurch Township. George continues to be listed a farmer at the age of 77.

George Sproxton died from a heart condition on March 28, 1883 and the age of 79.¹² Upon his death, George Sproxton's estate was passed to his son Albert. Born in 1859 in Whitchurch, Albert Sproxton married Mary Harman in Aurora in 1880. An 1886 edition of *The Liberal* describes Albert's move from Aurora to his own farm, likely the subject property in Whitchurch.¹³ Although Albert sold his family farm on Lot 6, Concession 2 in 1897, he continues to be listed as a tenant on the property in 1900. Census records reveal that Albert Sproxton left Ontario in the early 1900s, as he is recorded as residing in the Souris District of Manitoba in the 1906 Census of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta, and died near Moose Jaw Saskatchewan in 1926.¹⁴

Architecture:

Dating to circa 1853, the George Sproxton house at 13076 Leslie Street is a representative example of mid-19th century Georgian farmhouse architecture in the

¹¹ Rowsell's *City of Toronto and County of York Directory for 1850-1*. Toronto: Henry Rowsell, 1850; p. 134.

¹² *Death Certificate of George Sproxton*, 1883.

¹³ "White Rose," *Liberal*. Apr 1, 1886.

¹⁴ "Find A Grave Index," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:6PYQ-8M88 : 8 November 2023>), Albert Sproxton, ; Burial, Riverhurst, Moose Jaw Census Division, Saskatchewan, Canada, Riverhurst Cemetery; citing record ID 260870171, *Find a Grave*, <http://www.findagrave.com>.

former hamlet of Oak Ridges, in Whitchurch Township. The subject building is oriented to the south, and faces Bethesda Sideroad.

The George Sproxton House is a 1 ½-storey dichromatic brick building with a simple compound rectangular plan, comprised of a rectangular main house with a single-storey brick summer kitchen wing at the house's west elevation.

The George Sproxton House is simplistic in form and detailing and features a rubblestone foundation and red-brick cladding with buff brick quoins and voussoirs. The building's windows are flat-headed, with stone sills and buff-brick voussoirs, and many windows still contain historic six-over-six wood sash units. On the house's east elevation, the rubblestone foundation is also punctuated with flat-headed basement windows with red-brick voussoirs and quoining.

The house's principal (south) elevation, is organized into a symmetrical three-bay composition, with a central raised doorway flanked by two flat-headed windows with stone sills and buff brick voussoirs. This doorway features a four-paneled wooden door surmounted by a transom window with decorative diamond-shaped tracery. This main entrance is sheltered by a shed-roofed porch supported by tapered wooden posts. However, this porch is likely not original, as the outline of an earlier porch can be seen on the brick above first-storey windows on this elevation. The house's rear (north) elevation also features an asymmetrical three-bay composition, with a central doorway with a buff brick voussoir flanked by two flat-headed windows with stone sills and buff-brick voussoirs. The house's east and west (side) elevations feature symmetrical two-bay compositions of flat-headed windows with stone sills and buff-brick voussoirs. However, the addition of the summer kitchen wing has obscured some original window openings on the house's west elevation. The house also features a brick chimney at the west gable-end.

The single-storey summer kitchen wing on the house's west elevation also features flat-headed door and window openings with buff brick voussoirs and stone window sills. While the summer kitchen previously featured a side-gabled roof, it is now in a state of partial demolition, with the roof and some portions of walls missing.

Context:

The George Sproxton House is located on the west side of Leslie Street, north of Bethesda Sideroad, and within the Oak Ridges Moraine. The house retains its original location, orientation, and context within the large rural property at 13076 Leslie Street. While this property is now used as a cemetery, the surrounding context still expresses a predominantly rural, agricultural character, with little surrounding development. The house also retains its original farm lane running west from Leslie Street, currently used as the access road to both the George Sproxton House and the surrounding cemetery.

The subject property's surrounding context includes agricultural lands on the east side of Leslie Street and the south side of Bethesda Sideroad, the heavily wooded Haynes Lake Wetlands and Uplands to the west, Haynes Lake (formerly Sproxton Lake) to the north, and the Lake St. George Conservation Area to the northwest.

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 c. 1853, the George Sproxton House at 13076 Leslie Street has design and physical value as a representative example of mid-19th-century Georgian farmhouse architecture in the former hamlet of Oak Ridges. The building has retained many of its original architectural features representative of the Georgian architectural style, including its rectangular plan, medium-pitched side-gabled roof, rubblestone base and red brick cladding with buff brick quoins and voussoirs, flat headed windows with six-over-six wood sash units, and the main raised entrance with a paneled wooden door and transom.

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 subject property has historical and associative value as the former residence of two generations of the Sproxton family, who came to York County from Yorkshire, England in the early 19th century, and were early settlers and farmers in Whitchurch Township. George Sproxton built the existing dwelling as part of his farmstead c. 1853, and the Sproxton family farmed the property from around 1850 to 1900.

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 George Sproxton House is one of a number of nineteenth century farmhouses that help to define the historical agricultural character of the hamlet of Oak Ridges in Whitchurch Township.

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

The George Sproxton House has stood on this property since c.1853, when it was part of a farmstead owned by the Sproxton family in Oak Ridges. As such, the subject property retains long-standing and significant physical, visual and historical links to its surroundings, including to remaining landscape features of the original Sproxton farm such as the farm lane running west from Leslie Street, Hayes Lake (formerly Sproxton Lake) to the north, and the woodlands to the west. The subject property also has long-standing and significant physical, visual and historical links to the former agricultural community of Oak Ridges.

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

N/A

Maps and Photographs



Figure 1 Detail of 1860 Tremaine Map of York County, Whitchurch Township. The location of George Sproxton's property comprising the east half of Lot 6, Concession 2 is indicated in red. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).

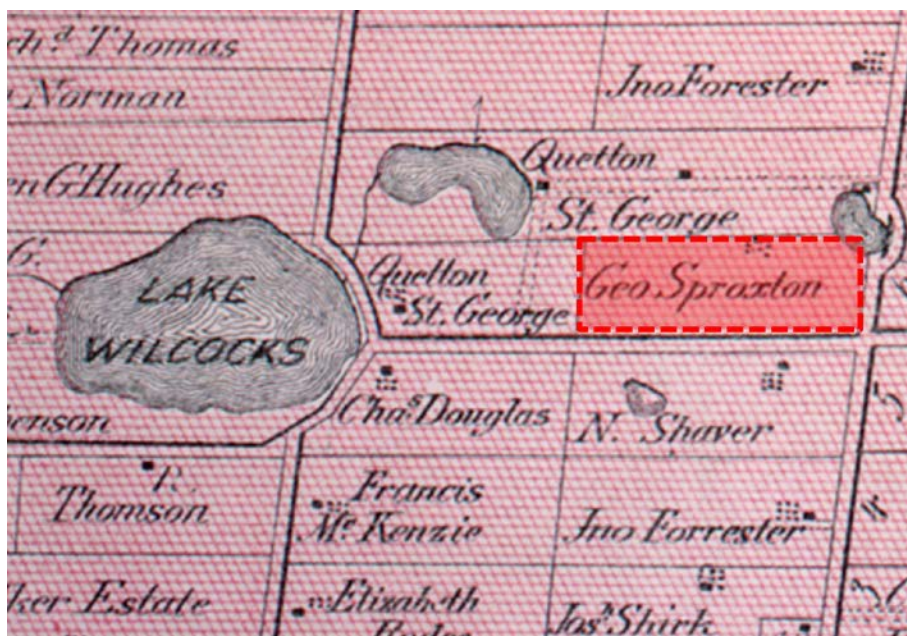


Figure 2 Detail of 1878 Illustrated Atlas, Whitchurch Twp, York County. The location of George Sproxton's property comprising the east half of Lot 6, Concession 2 is indicated in red. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).



Figure 3 View of the George Sproston House's west (side) and south (front) elevations, looking northeast. Note the summer kitchen wing on the house's west elevation is now partially demolished. (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 4 View of the George Sproston House's east (side) elevation, looking west. (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 5 View of the George Sproxton House's north (rear) elevation, looking southwest. (Source: HUD, 2011).



Figure 6 Detailed view of the George Sproxton House's main entrance on its south (front) elevation, showing the paneled wooden door and transom with decorative tracery. (Source: HUD, 2023).

Sources:

Archival Sources

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