

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



27 Church Street North – Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House

c. 1938

Part of Lot 47, Concession 1, Markham Township

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

History

27 Church Street North

The subject property at 27 Church Street North 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 1832.¹ Wright was an important early figure in York County and Richmond Hill. He 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.² Wright began subdividing Lot 47 in 1832,

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

² Robert M. Stamp, *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930* (Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991), 158.

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 1869, Amos Wright sold just over 10 acres of land within Lot 47 to Richmond Hill physician James Langstaff in two separate transactions totaling \$1,000.³ Langstaff then subdivided this property, located at the northeast corner of Church Street North and Centre Street East, into smaller building lots during the 1870s and 1880s. The 1879 Gibson Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill shows the subdivision of Langstaff's 10-acre parcel at the time, with Village Lot 26 located on the east side of Church Street North (Figure 1). Village Lot 26 would later become the subject property at 27 Church Street North.

While James Langstaff sold off most of this 10-acre property in Lot 47, he kept Village Lot 26 (the subject property) in his possession. When James Langstaff died in 1889, he left the vast majority of his Richmond Hill real estate holdings, including the subject property, to his son, Rolph Lewis Langstaff.⁴ However, Rolph Langstaff continued to reside and run his medical practice out of the Langstaff family home on Yonge Street until the late 1930s. Dr. Rolph Langstaff was joined in practice by his wife, Dr. Lillian Langstaff, in 1905, and later by his son, Dr. James Langstaff, in 1936.⁵

After Dr. James Langstaff married Barbara Miller in 1938, Rolph and Lillian decided to leave the family homestead on Yonge Street, and hired Toronto architect Thomas E. Muir to build their new house at 27 Church Street North. The Langstaffs had an existing connection to Muir, as Muir's wife, Isabel MacKay, was Lillian Langstaff's cousin. Lillian was also a witness at Muir and MacKay's marriage in 1916.⁶

The house at 27 Church Street North was completed circa 1938, and was featured in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* magazine in October of 1939. The article, titled "A Family Saga and Two Houses," describes the house as being of "simple colonial design and compact plan."⁷ The house is of frame construction, with a concrete block foundation, and was originally finished with large British Columbia cedar shingles, painted white.⁸ The article also included photographs of the house's exterior and interior (Figures 3-4), along with floorplans showing its interior configuration (Figure 5). It is evident in both the house's design and the *Canadian Homes and Gardens* article that the Colonial Revival style of the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House was intended to be a contemporary interpretation of the original Langstaff homestead, which features

³ *Ontario Land Registry Abstract/Parcel Register Book*, York Region, Concession 1, Lot 47, Markham Township (Richmond Hill).

⁴ Last Will and Testament of James Langstaff, 1885. *County of York Probate Records, 1889*. Accessed via Family Search.

⁵ Millie Stewart. "New tributes for Langstaffs," *Liberal*. Nov 30, 1977.

⁶ *York County Marriage Records, 1916*. Accessed via Family Search.

⁷ "A family saga in two houses," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* October 1939, p. 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Colonial Georgian architecture. Both houses originally shared a number of features, including a side-gabled roof, classical doorcase, multi-paned windows, shutters, and horizontal wood siding.

Both Rolph and Lillian Langstaff continued to practice medicine after moving to their new home at 27 Church Street North circa 1938. Although the couple both retired from medical practice in 1946,⁹ they remained active members of the Richmond Hill community throughout the remainder of their lives. Dr. Lillian Langstaff, in particular, was actively involved in a number of organizations, including the Richmond Hill Girl Guides, the Richmond Hill Horticultural Society, and the Richmond Hill Naturalists, and she hosted many events for these organizations at her home and garden at 27 Church Street North. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff continued to reside at 27 Church Street North until the end of their lives. After Rolph Langstaff died in 1969, and Lillian entered a private hospital for care in 1973,¹⁰ Lillian transferred the property at 27 Church Street North to her grandson, John Bruce Langstaff and his wife, Judith, in 1975.¹¹ The home remained under the ownership of the Langstaff family until at least the late-1990s, when Land Registry records end.

Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff

Rolph Langstaff was born to Dr. James Langstaff and Mary Ann Miller on January 24, 1869. Rolph grew up at Holmwood, the Langstaff family home on Yonge Street in Richmond Hill, and completed his early education in the village schools.¹² Rolph graduated from medical school at the University of Toronto, and completed postgraduate studies in Edinburgh.¹³ After James Langstaff's sudden death in 1889, Rolph returned to Richmond Hill and took over his father's medical practice out of Holmwood beginning in 1891.¹⁴ Dr. Rolph Langstaff played a key role in the medical development of the Town of Richmond Hill and York Region more broadly. His achievements include introducing the pasteurization of milk, the chlorination of the local water supply, and holding the role as the Town's first Public Health Officer from 1936 to 1945.¹⁵

In 1903, Rolph married medical student Lillian Elizabeth Carroll, and she joined him in practice after completing her studies in 1905.¹⁶ Lillian Carroll was born in Henderson, North Carolina, on January 21st, 1883. Her parents were Henry and Ellen (MacKay) Carroll.¹⁷ Dr. Lillian Langstaff was an influential member of the local community, and a pioneer in women's medicine in Ontario. When Lillian graduated from the Ontario Medical College for women in 1905, she received a Bachelor of Medicine degree, as the

⁹ "Centenarian physician died May 17th," *Liberal*. May 22, 1969.

¹⁰ "Dr. Lillian dies at 95," *Liberal*. Feb 8, 1978.

¹¹ *Ontario Land Registry Abstract/Parcel Register Book*, York Region, Concession 1, Lot 47, Markham Township (Richmond Hill).

¹² "Centenarian physician died May 17th," *Liberal*. May 22, 1969.

¹³ "Richmond Hill doctor lived to be 100," *Toronto Daily Star*. May 20, 1969.

¹⁴ "Centenarian physician died May 17th," *Liberal*. May 22, 1969.

¹⁵ Marney Beck Robinson and Joan M. Clark, *Later Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community from 1930 to 1999* (Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1999), 10.

¹⁶ "Lillian Langstaff began practicing medicine in 1905," *Toronto Star*. Feb 2, 1978.

¹⁷ "Rolph Langstaff Family Tree." Richmond Hill Public Library Digital Archives.

Page 4

school was not able to grant MD degrees to women at the time. It was not until 50 years after her graduation that she received an honorary MD degree.¹⁸

Dr. Lillian specialized in women's health care and pediatrics,¹⁹ and was known for her role as the physician at the women's jail farm at Concord, where she provided care to residents for over 20 years.²⁰ Many of the women at the farm were serving sentences for their husbands.²¹ In addition to her medical practice, Dr. Lillian was an active community member and was involved in many local organizations and institutions. She was the president of the Richmond Hill Canadian Red Cross during the First World War, one of the first members of the Richmond Hill Horticultural Society, an honorary member of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and helped establish the first local association of the Girl Guides in Richmond Hill. During her retirement, she hosted many events for the Girl Guides, Richmond Hill Naturalists, and Horticultural Society at her home and garden at 27 Church Street North. From the 1940s to the 1960s, Dr. Lillian was also part of the 'picnicate,' a group of eight prominent local women and nature lovers, including famed astronomer Dr. Helen Hogg, who went on picnics together several times a year as social gatherings.²² She was also president of the Richmond Hill Cancer Society, and honorary president of the York Central Hospital Auxiliary.²³ Due to her lifelong love of nature and horticulture, Dr. Lillian Langstaff Park was built in her honour at the York Central Hospital (now Mackenzie Health).

Both Rolph and Lillian Langstaff retired from medical practice in 1946,²⁴ well after moving to their new home at 27 Church Street North. As prominent community doctors, the Langstaffs were the first to own an automobile and telephone in Richmond Hill. A wing of the York Central Hospital (now Mackenzie Health) was also named in their honour.

Thomas E. Muirhead

Thomas Elliott Muirhead was born in Toronto on January 7th, 1890 and educated at the Toronto Technical School. He served an apprenticeship in the office of Bond & Smith from 1907 until 1913, then joined the City Architect's Department where he worked as a plan examiner until 1919. Muir married Isabel Mackay, the cousin of Lillian Langstaff, in 1916, and Lillian was a witness at their marriage.²⁵

From 1922 until 1928, Muir was staff architect for the John S. Kent Construction Co. in Toronto and in this capacity was responsible for the design of several of their office and commercial building projects in Toronto. He moved to New York City in 1928 to work for Peabody, Wilson & Brown and attended courses at the Art Students League. Muirhead

¹⁸ "Dr. Lillian dies at 95," *Liberal*. Feb 8, 1978.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Lillian Langstaff began practicing medicine in 1905," *Toronto Star*. Feb 2, 1978.

²¹ "Dr. Lillian dies at 95," *Liberal*. Feb 8, 1978.

²² Marney Beck Robinson and Joan M. Clark, *Later Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community from 1930 to 1999* (Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1999), 110.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Richmond Hill doctor lived to be 100," *Toronto Daily Star*. May 20, 1969.

²⁵ *York County Marriage Records, 1916*. Accessed via Family Search.

returned to Toronto in late 1930 and found employment with the Board of Education, the Toronto Harbour Commission, and with T. Pringle & Son as a staff architect. He moved to Ottawa after 1950 and died at Buckingham, Que. on 6 October 1961.²⁶

Architecture

Dating to circa 1938, the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North is a representative example of Colonial Revival residential architecture in Richmond Hill. While the Colonial Revival style first emerged in the United States in the late 19th century,²⁷ it was popularized in Canada beginning in the 1910s, largely for residential architecture.²⁸ The 1930s saw a particularly strong interest in Colonial Revival architecture throughout North America, due in part to a number of high-profile historical restoration projects in the United States during the 1920s, including that of Colonial Williamsburg.²⁹ Colonial Revival residential architecture is typified by features such as an accentuated front door, typically with a decorative surround or doorcase, a balanced (though in some cases asymmetrical) organization of windows and doors, a side-gabled roof, multi-paned windows, and horizontal wood siding. Asymmetrical facades became increasingly popular for Colonial Revival houses in the 1930s, in order to accommodate attached garages,³⁰ as is the case with 27 Church Street North.

The dwelling at 27 Church Street North is a 2-storey frame building with an irregular plan, comprised of an original building, with a later rear addition. The original portion of the building features an irregular plan comprised of a main rectangular section, with slightly-protruding west and north gabled bays, and an attached two-car garage to the north. The building also features a side-gabled roof with gabled dormer windows on the front (west) elevation. The building is of frame construction, and is clad in wide, painted shingles, arranged horizontally to resemble clapboard. Windows are flat headed, and typically contain double-hung, six-over-six units.

The building's front elevation is organized into three bays, with the main entrance offset to the north within a slightly-protruding gabled bay. The front doorway is accessed via two stone steps, and features a simple classical doorcase and paneled door with two glass lites at the top. The house also features an exterior brick chimney on its south elevation.

The attached two-car garage is part of the house's original design, and its roof connects to the main house to the south, providing a sheltered walkway to the back garden. The garage features a side-gabled roof and two paneled garage doors, each with a top row

²⁶ Robert G. Hill, "Muirhead, Thomas Elliott," *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950*. Accessed April 8, 2024. <http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/712>.

²⁷ Leslie Maitland, Jacqueline Hucker, and Shannon Ricketts, *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles* (Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 1992), 153.

²⁸ Leslie Maitland, Jacqueline Hucker, and Shannon Ricketts, *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles* (Peterborough ON: Broadview Press, 1992), 152.

²⁹ David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 22, no. 2/3 (1987).

³⁰ Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 321.

Page 6

of six lites. The front elevation of the garage is set back to allow for a colonnade of three columns within the overhang of the garage roof.

Based on historical aerial imagery, the house's rear addition appears to have been built between 1988 and 1995. The rear addition is not highly visible from the street.

Context

The Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North is located on the east side of Church Street North, between Centre Street East and Dunlop Street. The subject property was originally part of a 10-acre parcel located at the northeast corner of Church Street North and Centre Street East owned by James Langstaff in the mid-19th century. As Lot 47, Markham Township was slower to develop than its western counterpart in Vaughan, the surrounding context on Church Street North features a predominantly early-20th-century residential character, interspersed with some 19th century and later-20th-century (post-1960s) built form. The streetscape along Church Street North also features mature trees.

Surrounding historical properties on Church Street North include the C.H. Sanderson House at 9 Church Street North (c. 1938), the Amos Wright House at 19 Church Street North (c. 1840), the Albert Hill House at 20 Church Street North (c. 1927), the William Cook House at 26 Church Street North (1913), the John Duncan House at 38 Church Street North (1914), the dr. James Langstaff Rental House at 39 Church Street North (c. 1880), and the James H. Ramsden House at 40 Church Street North (c. 1914).

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 circa 1938, the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North is a representative example of Colonial Revival residential architecture in Richmond Hill. The Colonial Revival style, which emerged in Canada in the 1910s, was particularly popular for residential architecture in the 1930s. The Colonial Revival style holds additional significance for the Langstaff family, as their family homestead on Yonge Street, Holmwood (1849; now located at 107 Hall Street), features Colonial Georgian architecture. The house at 27 Church Street North has retained many of its original architectural details expressing the Colonial Revival style, including its generally

Page 7

rectangular plan with attached garage, side-gabled roof with dormers, wide shingle cladding, the balanced asymmetrical composition of its front façade, the off-centre doorway with classical doorcase, and six-over-six window units.

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 Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North has historical value for its direct associations with significant Richmond Hill doctors and community members Rolph and Lillian Langstaff. Dr. Rolph Langstaff began practicing medicine in Richmond Hill when he took over his father's medical practice in 1891. In 1905, his wife Dr. Lillian Langstaff, joined the family medical practice, with Dr. Lillian specializing in women's health and pediatrics. Together, Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff made significant contributions to the local community through their medical practice, which spanned over 50 years, as well as their involvement in multiple community organizations throughout most of their lives. Dr. Rolph Langstaff was responsible for introducing the pasteurization of milk and the chlorination of the local water supply in Richmond Hill, and held the role as local Public Health Officer from 1936 to 1945. Dr. Lillian Langstaff was an influential member of the local community, and a pioneer in women's medicine in Ontario. She was known for her role as physician at the Concord women's jail farm for over 20 years. She was also involved in the Richmond Hill Canadian Red Cross during the First and Second World Wars, was one of the first members of the Richmond Hill Horticultural Society, an honorary member of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and established the first local association of the Girl Guides in Richmond Hill. During her retirement, she hosted many events for the Girl Guides, Richmond Hill Naturalists, and Horticultural Society at her home and garden at 27 Church Street North.

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

Page 8

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 Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North has contextual value because its scale, form, and 1930s Colonial Revival architectural style are important in defining and maintaining the predominantly early-20th-century residential character of the surrounding streetscape on Church Street North, 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.

The subject property also has contextual value for its physical and historical links to its surroundings as part of a large 10-acre lot owned by James Langstaff at the northeast corner of Church Street North and Centre Street East, which he purchased in 1869. The subject property was owned by the Langstaff family from 1869 to the early 21st century, and is linked to surrounding properties also owned by the Langstaffs, including the James Langstaff Rental House at 39 Church Street North (c. 1880) to the north.

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

N/A

Maps and Photographs

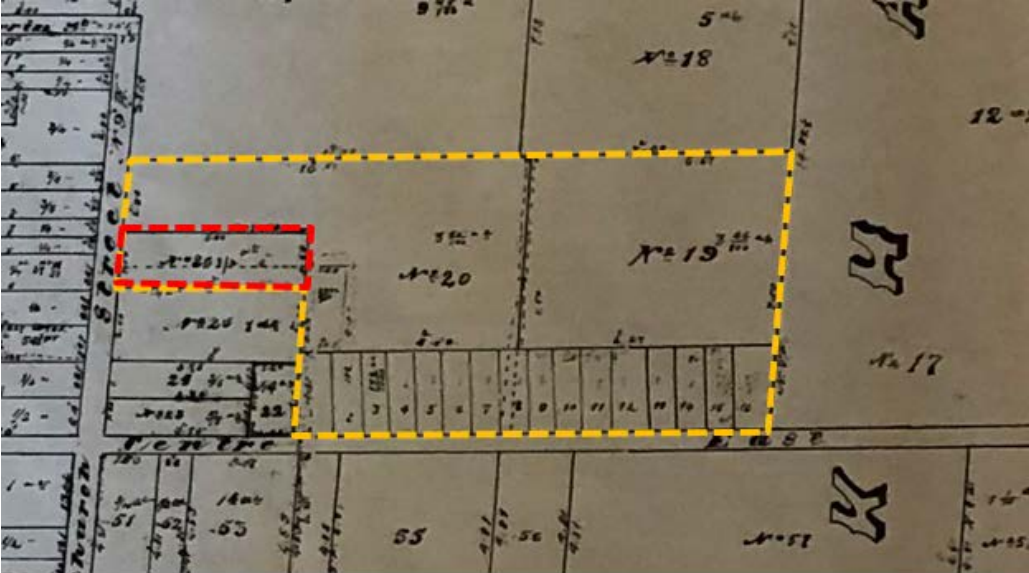


Figure 1 Detail of the 1879 Gibson Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill, with the approximate location of the subject property at 27 Church Street North shown in red (then known as Village Lot 26), and the approximate location of James Langstaff’s original 10-acre property at the northeast corner of Centre Street East and Church Street North shown in yellow (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).

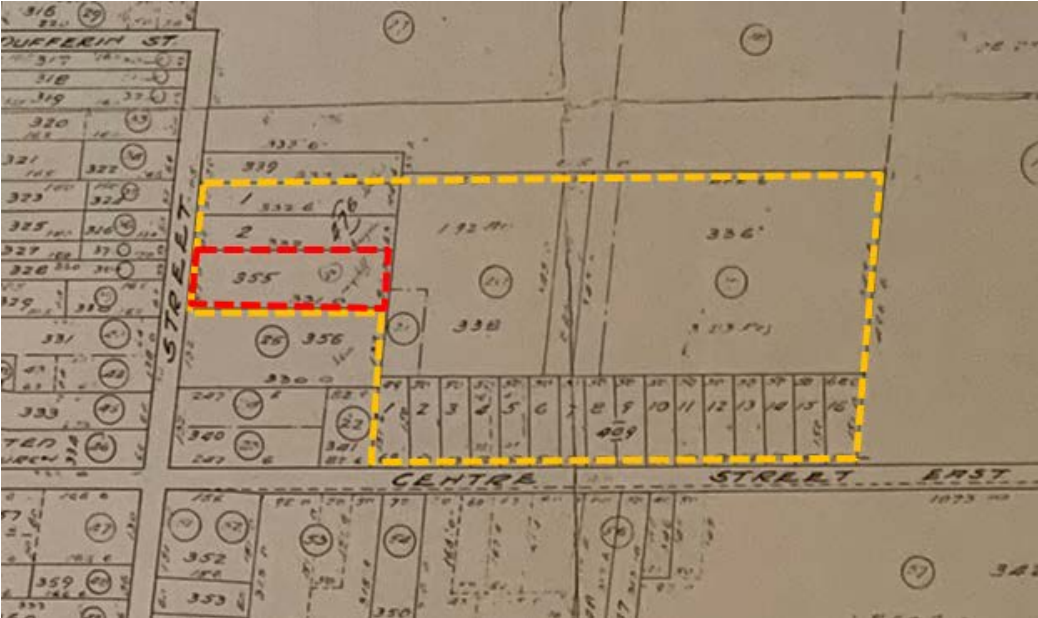


Figure 2 Detail of the 1938 Reuben Map of the Village of Richmond Hill, with the approximate location of the subject property at 27 Church Street North shown in red (then known as Lot 355), and the approximate location of James Langstaff’s original 10-acre property at the northeast corner of Centre Street East and Church Street North shown in yellow (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection).



Figure 3 1939 Photograph of the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House's front (west) elevation shortly after it was completed circa 1938, as featured in an article in *Canadian Homes and Gardens Magazine* (Source: *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1939).



Figure 4 1939 interior photograph of the living room of the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North, as featured in an article in *Canadian Homes and Gardens Magazine* (Source: *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1939).

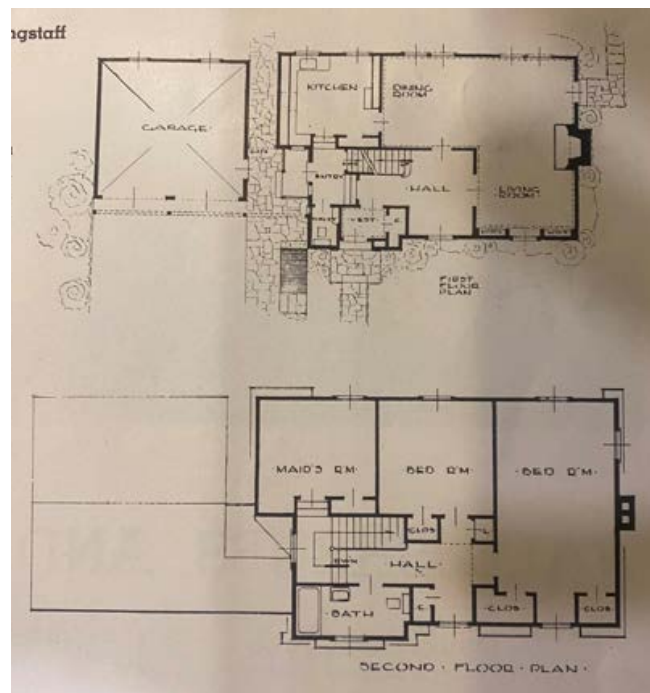


Figure 5 Original floor plans of the Drs. Rolph and Lillian Langstaff House at 27 Church Street North, created by architect Thomas E. Muirhead, and as featured in an article in *Canadian Homes and Gardens Magazine* (Source: *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1939).



Figure 6 Photograph of the front (west) elevation of the subject property at 27 Church Street North. Note the house's rectangular plan with attached garage, side-gabled roof with dormers, wide shingle cladding arranged in horizontal rows, the asymmetrical yet balanced composition of the front façade, the off-centre doorway with classical doorcase, and six-over-six window units (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 7 Photograph of the front (west) elevation of the subject property at 27 Church Street North. Note the house's rectangular plan with attached garage, side-gabled roof with dormers, wide shingle cladding arranged in horizontal rows, the asymmetrical yet balanced composition of the front façade, the off-centre doorway with classical doorcase, and six-over-six window units (Source: HUD, 2023).



Figure 8 Photograph of the front (west) and side (north) elevations of the subject property at 27 Church Street North. Note the house's rectangular plan with attached garage, side-gabled roof with dormers, wide shingle cladding arranged in horizontal rows, the asymmetrical yet balanced composition of the front façade, the off-centre doorway with classical doorcase, and six-over-six window units (Source: HUD, 2023).

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Page 14

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