

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



165 Richmond Street - James Freek House

c. 1860

Part of Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township

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

History

Contextual History

The James Freek house at 165 Richmond Street is a residential structure in the City of Richmond Hill's historic village core. Prior to colonization and settlement, the land was inhabited by the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunee, and the Huron Wendat First Nations. Following the Toronto Purchase in 1787, the area was subdivided into townships, concessions, and lots. 165 Richmond Street is within the former Lot 47 Concession 1 in Vaughan Township, which is associated with a period of intense early development within the village along Yonge, Centre, Elizabeth, Richmond, Wright, and Mill Streets from 1810 to 1850. When the house was constructed around 1860, it was already part of the village core, and was surrounded by residential and industrial properties, including a brick-making facility run by the Freek family.¹

¹ Janet Fayle, *A Brief History of Richmond Hill* (Town of Richmond Hill LACAC, 1993), 1.

165 Richmond Street

The first owner of Lot 47 Concession 1 was John E. Stooks, who was granted 210 acres by the Crown in 1808 and farmed the land. In 1810 the lot 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. Over the next several decades, the property was subdivided into building lots and sold for development or speculation. Bridgeford split the property in two halves and sold the north 105 acres of the property back to Henry J. Boulton in 1820, who subdivided it further. The present structure sits on the northeast part of the original lot.²

Sometime in the mid- to late-19th century, the parcel was reduced to 6 acres, although land registry records do not show when this happened. Sources indicate that James Freek was living in Vaughan Township in a one-storey brick house (likely the subject dwelling) by 1861,³ dating the house to c. 1860. According to an 1866 directory, Freek was living on a part of lot 47 concession 1,⁴ and an 1881 voter's list places him at village lot 18 on lot 47.⁵ According to the 1879 Gibson Plan, lot 18 was located on the north side of Richmond Street, east of Trench Street, where 165 Richmond stands today.⁶ Newspaper sources further confirm Freek's location on Richmond Street. In 1875, a public notice featured in *The York Herald* describes the opening of a new street, now known as Bridgeport Street, which connects Richmond and Mill Streets. The notice describes how the proposed roadwork will commence on Richmond Street in a northerly course, along the "western boundary of James Freek's Village lot."⁷

According to newspaper sources, the land continued to be used for both residential and agricultural purposes while Freek owned it.⁸ According to land registry records, James Freek sold the property to James Millington in 1902 for \$1300. In 1902, James Millington sold 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres to Geo. P. Allison, who resided in a brick house⁹ on the property until 1925, when the land was purchased by Edith J. Walker.¹⁰ While the original brick house featured a rectangular plan and massing, a rear brick wing was added to the structure in 1925-26, giving the house its existing L-shaped plan.¹¹ In 1929, the property was sold to Thomas H. Anderson. The property sale from Walker to Anderson confirms the site's location. According to land registry records, Anderson's new 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ acre property was located 28 chains 25 links (approx. 568 meters) west of

² *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

³ *Census of Canada*, 1861.

⁴ *Mitchell & Co's general directory for the city of Toronto and gazetteer of the counties of York and Peel for 1866*. Toronto: Mitchell & Co., 1866.

⁵ *List of Voters for the Village of Richmond Hill*, Richmond Hill: Liberal Printing and Publishing House, 1881.

⁶ Gibson. *Plan of the Village of Richmond Hill, County of York*. 1879.

⁷ "Municipality of Richmond Hill - Public Notice" *The York Herald*, May 28, 1875.

⁸ "Court of Appeal" *The Liberal*, July 27, 1893.

⁹ *Census of Canada*, 1921.

¹⁰ *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

¹¹ Richmond Hill Local Architectural Advisory Committee (LACAC). "Heritage Building Summary – 165 Richmond Street." Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection, date Unknown.

Yonge Street. During the twentieth century, the parcel was reduced to its current 0.22 acre footprint and limited to 165 Richmond Street.¹²

James Freek & Freek Family

The Freek family, for whom the house is named, was the most prominent family to reside at 165 Richmond Street. The family was known for their longstanding tradition of brick production, and played a role in the early construction industry in Richmond Hill.

James Freek was born on May 11, 1818 in the Town of Shelby, Yorkshire, England. James immigrated to Canada as a young man, first settling in Yorkville. After moving to Richmond Hill in the 1850s and inheriting his father-in-law's brickyard on Trench Street, James Freek Engaged in farming and the manufacturing of brick, shingles, and drainage tile. James supplied the early settlers of the village with building supplies and often sent his goods to York (Toronto) for sale as well. An advertisement for the sale of shingles by James Freek can be seen in an 1871 feature in *The Liberal*.¹³ In 1842, James married Mary Townsley, the daughter of William Townsley, Esquire of Yorkville, and a pioneer brick-maker of York.¹⁴ James and Mary had four children: William, Jessie, Thomas, and Mary.

James' father in-law, William Townsley, was an important figure in York's early brickwork operations and is known for his work on the clay deposits of Yorkville, where the Castle Frank Brook crossed Yonge Street, in the early 1800s.¹⁵ By 1855, William Townsley had patented his own brick manufacturing machines.¹⁶

James Freek began his career in brick-manufacturing working under William Townsley in Yorkville before moving to Richmond Hill with his family in the 1850s. Sometime before 1861, James acquired a 6-acre parcel fronting Richmond Street, where the family resided (Lot 18, Plan 481, Figure 1). James Freek also inherited a brickyard from Townsley, and was its proprietor until about 1878.¹⁷ James Freek, sometimes misspelt as 'Freak,' is listed as a brick-maker and brick-yard proprietor in Richmond Hill in several directories, including the Mitchell's Canada Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1864-65 and The Ontario Gazetteer and Directories of 1869 and 1871. James Freek was also a class leader in the local Methodist Church for many years, a member of the board of trustees in 1881, and at one time superintendent of the Sabbath (Sunday) School.¹⁸

¹² *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 47, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

¹³ "To Builders – Shingles!" *The York Herald*, May 5, 1871.

¹⁴ "Freek Family File." Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection.

¹⁵ Harris, Mary. "Remember This: If It's Barrie Brick Then It's Likely a Freek." *BarrieToday.com*, 2023. <https://www.barrietoday.com/columns/remember-this/remember-this-if-its-barrie-brick-then-its-likely-a-freek-6826042>.

¹⁶ Mulvaney, Charles. *History of Toronto and York, Ontario*. Robinson C. Blackett. 1885.

¹⁷ The City of Richmond Hill. *Museum of The Streets*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Richmond Hill Heritage Centre, n.d.

¹⁸ "Death of James Freek" *The Liberal*, July 17, 1902.

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An active member in the early Richmond Hill community, James ran for a position on the first village council but was unsuccessful.¹⁹ James was appointed as a municipal fence viewer by council the same year.²⁰ With this title, James was responsible for resolving disputes and issues related to property boundaries and fencing.

After 1902, James Freek moved to Barrie, Ontario to live with his son William, where he had established his own successful brickworks operation. In July of 1902, after suffering from apoplexy for a short period of time, James died at his son's estate in Barrie, at the age of 84.²¹ All three of his sons continued to work in brick production across Ontario.

Archival records suggest that bricks from James Freek's brickworks operations were used in the early renovations of 111 Richmond Street, as well as many other built structures in Richmond Hill.²² The products of James and his sons are almost entirely anonymous, and it is believed that countless structures throughout Richmond Hill, Barrie, and St. Thomas are constructed from Freek bricks.²³

Architecture

Dating to circa 1860, the James Freek house at 165 Richmond Street is a rare and unique example of mid-19th century architecture in Richmond Hill that combines elements of both the Georgian and Victorian architectural styles.

The James Freek house is a one-and-a-half-storey brick building with a 1920s rear addition, which gives the structure an L-shaped footprint. The structure is constructed of soft-mixed buff brick with tooled pointing, laid in stretcher bond, on a stone and brick foundation. Three courses of pink brick above the foundation slightly project from the building, acting as a water table, which is visible all on elevations. The building features a symmetrical centre-hall plan, and side-gabled roof that transitions to a saltbox roof at the east gable-end, with gabled dormers on its front (south) elevation.

Most of the building's window openings are segmental-arched with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and are organized into balanced groupings. None of the existing window units appear to be original.

The house's front (south) elevation is symmetrically organized into three bays, with a central entranceway featuring a classical doorcase flanked by two segmental-arched windows with eight-paned vinyl window units and exterior shutters. The house's front elevation also features a full-façade verandah with a bellcast roof and treillage supports.

The ground level of the building's east (side) elevation also features an entranceway, sheltered by a bellcast roof, while the second storey of this elevation features a large three-part flat-headed window opening with a central single-hung window between two

¹⁹ Stamp, Robert M. *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Richmond Hill Local Architectural Advisory Committee (LACAC). "Heritage Building Summary – 165 Richmond Street." Richmond Hill Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection, date Unknown.

²³ Harris, Mary. "Remember This: If It's Barrie Brick Then It's Likely a Freek." *BarrieToday.com*, 2023.

casement windows. Both the entrance and the second-storey window on the house's east elevation appear to be later alterations. Also visible on the east elevation is the structure's saltbox roofline, which steeply slopes from south to north with raking ends, boxed soffits, and a wide-molded frieze.

Elements representative of the Georgian architectural tradition include the balanced form and composition of the original front (south) portion of the house, the saltbox roof with gabled dormers, buff brick cladding, segmental-arched windows with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and classical doorcase. Elements representative of the Victorian architectural tradition include the bellcast veranda with treillage on the house's front (south) elevation.

Context

The James Freek house at 165 Richmond Street is located on the north side of Richmond Street, west of Elmdale Court and east of Bridgeport Street. It is part of Richmond Hill's historic village core, which developed starting in the early 19th century around Yonge Street. The property is also associated with the brickyard at 71 Trench Street to the west, which was owned and operated by James Freek from 1853 to roughly 1878.

The surrounding neighborhood is characterized by an eclectic mixture of building styles. East and west of the property, Richmond Street features a predominantly fine-grained late-19th and early-20th century residential built form. However, due to societal and technological changes, several smaller houses were replaced by higher-density residential slab buildings, large surface parking lots, and commercial/servicing buildings to the east towards Yonge Street.

The shrubbery, large trees, and garden in front of the house create an enclave of green space within the surrounding streetscape on Richmond Street and are important aspects in defining, supporting, and maintaining the character of Richmond Street as an example of an early rural Ontario village hamlet.

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.

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Dating to circa 1860, the James Freek House at 165 Richmond Street has design and physical value as a rare and unique example of mid-19th century residential architecture that combines elements of both the Georgian and Victorian architectural styles. Elements representative of the Georgian architectural tradition include the balanced form and composition of the original front (south) portion of the house, the saltbox roof with gabled dormers, buff brick cladding, segmental-arched windows with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and classical doorcase. Elements representative of the Victorian architectural tradition include the bellcast veranda with treillage on the house's front (south) elevation.

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 James Freek House has historical value for its direct associations with James Freek and his family. James Freek, who was the owner of a brick manufacturing operation in Richmond Hill, a municipal fence viewer, and a farmer, built the subject dwelling around 1860 and lived there until he left Richmond Hill for Barrie in 1902. A family of local business leaders, employers, and active citizens, the Freeks were significant members of the community who contributed to the economic and physical development of Richmond Hill in the 19th century. The subject dwelling is constructed of buff bricks manufactured at the nearby Freek brickyard on Trench Street.

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 James Freek House has contextual value because its scale, form, and unique mix of 19th-century Georgian and Victorian architectural styles are important in defining and maintaining the predominantly fine-grained 19th and early-20th century residential character of the surrounding streetscape on Richmond Street, 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 James Freek House has contextual value for being functionally and historically linked to its surroundings on the north side of Richmond Street, east of Trench Street. The Freek family were early brick manufacturers in Richmond Hill, and owned a brickyard at the northeast corner of Trench and Richmond Streets, in close proximity to the subject property. The brickyard operated from the early- to mid-19th century and produced bricks used in construction throughout Richmond Hill. As the structure was built to house a major brick manufacturing family, its historical proximity to Richmond Hill's former industrial areas gives context to the development of the village.

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 (Plan 481), showing the approximate location of the subject property (indicated in red) within James Freek's 6-acre Lot 18 (outlined in yellow). James Freek's Brickyard at the northeast corner of Trench and Richmond Streets is outlined in blue. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library Local History and Genealogy Collection)



Figure 2 View of the James Freek House's front (south) and partial east (side) elevation, looking northwest. Note the building's saltbox roof with gabled dormers, buff brick cladding, segmental-arched windows with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and bellcast-roofed verandah with treillage. (Source: HUD, 2023)



Figure 3 View of the James Freek House's west (side) elevation, looking northeast. Note the pink-brick water table above the foundation, segmental-arched window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and the later buff-brick rear addition. (Source: HUD, 2023)



Figure 4 Detailed view of the James Freek House's east (side) elevation, looking northwest. Note the house's saltbox roof at the east gable end. (Source: HUD, 2023)

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