

Statement of Significance

10039 Yonge Street – Maxwell-Stanford House

The Maxwell-Stanford House at 10039 Yonge Street is recommended for designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act as a property of cultural heritage value or interest, as described in the following Statement of Significance.

Description of Property

The Maxwell-Stanford House at 10039 Yonge Street is a 1 ½-storey frame building with a rectangular plan and gabled roof located on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Major Mackenzie Drive East. The property is located within the historic village of Richmond Hill.

Design and Physical Value

Dating to c. 1860, the Maxwell-Stanford House at 10039 Yonge Street has design and physical value as a modest representative example of the mid-Victorian Gothic Revival Cottage architectural style. Features representative of this style include the house's simple, rectangular plan, form, and massing, medium-pitched side-gabled roof, central dormer inset with a narrow second-storey window, the balanced composition of its front (west) façade, and flat-headed window and door openings.

Historical and Associative Value

The Maxwell-Stanford House has historical value for its direct associations Dr. John Duncumb. The house is believed to have been acquired by Dr. Duncumb when he expanded "Duncumb's corner" by buying the former Masonic Arms Hotel property on Yonge Street in 1870. The house would have been rented out by Duncumb as part of his large real estate holdings, and was relocated to its current location by Duncumb's nephew and executor, Christopher Duncumb, c. 1880. Dr. Duncumb was one of Richmond Hill's most prominent early citizens, and was known as a skilled physician, a politician, and a very successful businessman with property holdings in Richmond Hill village and beyond.

The subject property also has historical value for its direct associations with Lucy and Hesse A. Nicholls. Lucy Nicholls ran the Richmond Hill Hotel (or simply the Nicholls Hotel) on Yonge Street with her husband, Richard, from the 1850s until his death in 1863. Lucy Nicholls bought the subject dwelling (then part of a larger property also containing "Duncumb's Hall") from Christopher Duncumb in 1881. Lucy and her son, Hesse, lived at "Duncumb's Hall" and rented the subject dwelling out to various tenants until the 1920s. Hesse Nicholls was also a prominent early resident of Richmond Hill. Hesse started his career as a teacher, and later became a real estate and insurance broker. He also was a Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, Clerk of the Division Court, Board of Education trustee, member of the village Council, a prominent Mason, and an active member of St. Mary's Anglican Church. While Secretary of the Agricultural Society, he was largely responsible for the long and successful record of the local fair.

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The subject property has further historical value for its direct associations with Susannah Maxwell. Maxwell, who resided in the subject dwelling from at least 1891 to 1894, and possibly earlier, was one of Richmond Hill's most prominent early Black residents. Susannah was born to free Black parents in Pennsylvania around 1805 and immigrated to Canada via the Underground Railroad in the late 1850s. After living briefly in Toronto, Susannah and her family moved to Richmond Hill around 1871, where Susannah became a laundress, eventually running a laundry business with her two daughters, Mary and Tillie, out of their home on Yonge Street. When Susannah died in 1923 at the age of 117, she was reportedly Canada's oldest citizen. The Maxwells, who appear to have been the only Black family in the village for many years, were well-respected community members and citizens of Richmond Hill, and were active in the village's development during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The subject property also has historical value for its direct associations with Harry and Elizabeth Ann Stanford. The Stanfords immigrated to Canada from England in 1913 and owned and resided in the subject dwelling at 10039 Yonge Street from around 1928 to 1976. Both Harry and Ann Stanford were active members of the Richmond Hill community from the 1920s to the 1960s. Harry was the warden emeritus of St. Mary's Anglican church, a member of the choir for fifty-three years, and caretaker of the Richmond Hill High School for thirty-three years. Ann Stanford worked in practical nursing for many years in Richmond Hill and ran a nursing home, primarily for maternity and childbirth, out of the upstairs bedrooms of her home from the late 1930s to 1950s.

The subject dwelling has historical value because its association with Susannah Maxwell and her family yields information that contributes to an understanding of the early African American community who migrated to Canada via the Underground Railroad during the 19th century. The family laundry business, difficult, dirty work often taken on by minority groups unable to find alternative employment, also reveals the discrimination faced by Blacks in Canada at this time.

The subject property has further historical value for its use as "Mrs. Stanford's nursing home" from the late 1930s to 1950s, which yields information about the history of maternal care and childbirth in Ontario. Nursing homes such as this, which bridged the gap between earlier traditional home births and later fully medicalized hospital births, originated from a period of unprecedented maternal and infant mortality in Canada during the 1920s and 1930s.

The subject property also has historical value as its front portico reflects the work and ideas of prominent Ontario architect B. Napier Simpson. Born and educated in Toronto, Simpson established a thriving private practice in Thornhill focused on heritage restoration and undertook commissions throughout the province. Simpson was also a member of the Executive Board of the Architectural Conservancy, the Toronto Historical Board, the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. B. Napier Simpson died tragically in an air crash in 1978. The restoration work at 10039 Yonge Street, including the addition of the bell-cast front portico, is his only known project in Richmond Hill.

Contextual Value

Standing in its current location since c. 1880, the subject property has contextual value for being historically and functionally linked to its surroundings within an area formerly known as “Duncumb’s corner” in the south end of Richmond Hill village. The house was located on the same property as Dr. John Duncumb’s brick home and public hall, “Duncumb’s Hall” (10027 Yonge Street, now demolished), until it was severed in the 1920s. While Duncumb’s Hall was demolished in 2020, the historical and functional links between the subject property and “Duncumb’s corner” are still expressed in the house’s location and orientation on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Major Mackenzie Drive East.

Heritage Attributes

Design and Physical Value

The heritage attributes that contribute to the value of the property as a modest representative example of the mid-Victorian Gothic Revival Cottage architectural style in Richmond Hill are:

- The scale, form and massing of the 1 ½-storey building with a rectangular plan;
- The medium-pitched side-gabled roof with a front gable;
- The building’s materials, including the brick and rubblestone foundation and frame construction;
- The appearance of clapboard siding;
- The balanced composition of the building’s front (west) elevation, featuring a three-bay composition at ground-floor level and a single second-storey window opening within the front gable; and
- Typical flat-headed window and door openings on the front (west) and side (north and south) elevations.

Historical and Associative Value

The heritage attributes that contribute to the value of the property for its associations with several significant owners and occupants, including the Duncumbs, Nicholls, Susannah Maxwell and the Stanfords are:

- The house’s scale, siting, and orientation on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Major Mackenzie Drive East; and
- The house’s modest mid-Victorian Gothic Revival Cottage architectural style.

The heritage attribute that contributes to the value of the property for its associations with the work and ideas of prominent heritage architect B. Napier Simpson is:

- The house’s bellcast-roofed front portico, on delicate wooden supports inset with wood latticing.

Contextual Value

The heritage attribute that contributes to the value of the property for its functional and visual historical links to its surroundings within “Duncumb’s corner” is:

- The house’s scale, siting, and orientation on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Major Mackenzie Drive East, directly north of “Duncumb’s Hall” (now demolished).

Note: the house’s rear (east) shed-roofed addition is not considered to possess significant heritage attributes.