

Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



12345 Yonge Street – Ryan-Paxton House

Circa 1893

Part of Lot 61 Concession 1, Whitchurch Township

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

History

Contextual History

The Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street is a circa 1893 frame structure with red brick veneer located on Yonge Street north of Stouffville Road. 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. The Ryan-Paxton House is located on the east side of Yonge Street within what was formerly Lot 61, Concession 1 in Whitchurch Township. At the time of the subject building's construction, northern Yonge Street near Bond Lake was a predominantly rural area, surrounded by natural and agricultural landscapes, and the subject property was one of numerous farms in the area. The subject structure was built circa 1893 for the Ryan family, who lived and farmed on the property until 1991.

12345 Yonge Street

The first settler on Lot 61 Concession 1 in Whitchurch township was Baron Von Weide, who built a house on the land around 1795. However, as a Berczy settler, Von Weide

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was unable to gain title and relocated by the early nineteenth century.¹ It is not known when the Von Weide house was demolished or when exactly Von Weide vacated the property.

After Whitchurch township was formally divided into lots and concessions by the Crown, the north half of Lot 61 Concession 1, totaling 95 acres, was granted to Michael Saigon in 1820. The 1837 directory confirms that Saigon owned the property, although it is unknown whether he lived or farmed on it.² Sometime before 1850, the property was transferred to Joseph Saigon, who sold 91 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres of the land to Charles Robertson in 1850. Over the next few years, Robertson acquired the remaining 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres in the north half of Lot 61, and in 1856, sold the full 95 acres of land to William Ellis.³

In 1862, the north half of Lot 61 was sold to Moses Gamble, who sold it to Margaret Mortson in 1866 before buying it back the same year. Although Gamble owned the property for over two decades, there is no indication that he ever resided on it. Historic maps do not show a structure on the lot in 1860 and 1878,⁴ and census records from 1871 and 1881 show that Gamble lived in Markham township.⁵ Regardless, directory records consistently place Moses Gamble on Lot 61 Concession 1 from 1866 to 1884,⁶ indicating that he likely farmed the subject property.⁷

Archival records show that by 1884, Gamble was renting Lot 61 to tenant farmers, Michael and Patrick Ryan. According to an oral history interview conducted with the Paxton family in 1983 by researcher Mary-Lou Griffin, the Ryan family moved into a log house on Lot 61 in 1884.⁸ The family history is corroborated by archival documentation. A tenant agreement between Moses Gamble and Michael and Patrick Ryan shows that the Ryans have been on the property since September 4, 1884,⁹ and directories from 1887 and 1888 show that the Ryans were tenant farmers on Lot 61.¹⁰ Further, census records show that the family lived on the property, instead of just farming the land - according to the 1891 census, the Ryan family lived in a wooden two-storey, five room house in Whitchurch township.¹¹

¹ Stamp, Robert M. *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991.

² *The City of Toronto and the home district commercial directory and register, with almanack and calendar for 1837*. Toronto, 1837.

³ *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 61, Concession 1, Whitchurch Township.

⁴ Tremaine, George R. "Tremaine's Map of York County." Canada West, Toronto 1860; Illustrated historical atlas of the county of York and the township of West Gwillimbury & town of Bradford in the county of Simcoe, Ont. Toronto : Miles & Co., 1878.

⁵ *Census of Canada*, 1871, 1881.

⁶ *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; *County of York Gazetteer and Directory: First Edition*. Toronto: W.H. Irwin & Co., 1870-1, 1881.

⁷ *Census of Canada*, 1871. Census records show that Moses Gamble was a farmer.

⁸ Murdoch, Su. "Ryan-Paxton House." Su Murdoch Historical Consulting, 2002.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Union Publishing Co.'s (of Ingersoll) farmers' and business directory for the counties of Ontario, Peel and York*. Ingersoll: Union Publishing Company, 1887, 1888.

¹¹ *Census of Canada*, 1891.

Moses Gamble died in September 1892, and according to his will, gave his executors the responsibility of selling the 95 acre property on Lot 61.¹² In 1893, the property was sold to Patrick and Michael Ryan,¹³ who operated a farm with their brother, John, on the property until their deaths in 1934 and 1937, respectively.¹⁴ After their deaths, the property ownership was transferred to Mary and Walter Paxton, relatives of the Ryans. In 1963, the property was granted to Basil and Leonora Paxton, who remained on the property until 1991.¹⁵ During the 20th century, the farm was sold off, and only 3 acres of land remain within the subject property today.¹⁶

Archival documentation shows that the Ryan-Paxton House was built by the Ryan family around 1893. Oral history states that the Ryan family moved into a log house on Lot 61 in 1884, indicating that the subject building was not yet present on the property. The 1891 census also describes the Ryan family living in a five-room house, which is significantly smaller than the subject property.¹⁷ While an oral history conducted by Mary-Lou Griffin suggests that some of the house's plasterwork was completed in 1892,¹⁸ it is more likely that the Ryans constructed this house after formally acquiring the property in 1893.

Ryan-Paxton Family

The Ryan-Paxton family were the most prominent residents to own and live at 12345 Yonge Street. The family rented the property beginning in 1884, purchased the land and built the subject property around 1893, and resided on the property until 1991.

The first generation of the Ryan-Paxton family to live on and own 12345 Yonge Street were Michael, Patrick, and John Ryan, three brothers who farmed the property starting in 1884. The Ryans were a Canadian-born, Roman Catholic family of Irish descent.¹⁹ When the family first moved to Lot 61, the brothers lived in a log cabin along with their mother, Mary, and Mary's two grandchildren, Mary and Edward Hogan.²⁰ In 1893, the subject building was constructed.

Like many of the properties along northern Yonge Street and surrounding Bond Lake, the Ryan-Paxton property was a longstanding family farm that operated for generations. Census records show that the Ryans were dairy farmers and that the farm had one barn on the property.²¹ In 1897, the Ryans purchased a secondhand farm engine with their neighbor, George Campbell.²² Records also show the farm was large; the Ryans

¹² *Ontario Probate Records*. Whitchurch Township, York County. Accessed via Family Search.

¹³ *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 61, Concession 1, Whitchurch Township.

¹⁴ *Census of Canada*, 1901.

¹⁵ *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 61, Concession 1, Whitchurch Township.

¹⁶ Murdoch, Su. "Ryan-Paxton House." Su Murdoch Historical Consulting, 2002.

¹⁷ *Census of Canada*, 1891.

¹⁸ Murdoch, Su. "Ryan-Paxton House." Su Murdoch Historical Consulting, 2002.

¹⁹ *Census of Canada*, 1901.

²⁰ Murdoch, Su. "Ryan-Paxton House." Su Murdoch Historical Consulting, 2002.

²¹ *Census of Canada*, 1901, 1931.

²² *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 61, Concession 1, Whitchurch Township. Deeds accessed via Family Search.

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farmed an additional 50 acres of land alongside the 95 acres they owned on Lot 61, farming a total of 145 acres of land.

The three Ryan brothers died between 1934 and 1937, and upon their deaths, the property was transferred to Mary Paxton (nee Hogan), who lived on the farm as a child, and her husband, Walter. Archival records show that the Paxtons continued the farm's operations for decades, and newspaper advertisements from *The Liberal* paint a picture of the family farm. The Paxtons raised a variety of animals, including swine,²³ goats,²⁴ cattle,²⁵ horses²⁶ and geese.²⁷ The farm also grew and sold fall wheat,²⁸ Timothy hay and alfalfa,²⁹ and hired workers to help with farm work.³⁰

After Mary Paxton's death in 1968,³¹ her son, Basil Paxton, resided on the subject property until 1991.

Architecture

The Ryan-Paxton House, built circa 1893, is a representative example of the vernacular late-Victorian farmhouse architectural style.

The late-Victorian vernacular architectural style is a broad term used to describe structures built between 1870 and 1900 that don't fit into other 19th century architectural styles. Late-Victorian houses were constructed of various materials, including stone, brick, and wood, and often used a mixture of Gothic and Classical stylistic elements. While vernacular late-Victorian farmhouses in Ontario vary in style and detailing, many of them follow the same trends and employ similar features. The Ryan-Paxton House is an example of the vernacular late-Victorian farmhouse style because of elements including its two-storey massing, frame construction with brick veneer, rubble stone foundation, complex cross-gabled roof, verandahs, and projecting bay.³²

The Ryan-Paxton House is a two-storey frame structure with a rubble stone foundation, red brick veneer and three brick chimneys. The house is oriented towards Yonge Street and is set back from the road. While the building has an irregular footprint, it appears L-shaped from the street. The house also features a complex cross-gable roof with gable ends on the north, south, east and west elevations.

The house's front (west) façade is asymmetrical but balanced. At grade, there is an enclosed, one-storey hipped-roof verandah located within the structure's ell. The

²³ "Strayed." *The Liberal*, June 27 1929.

²⁴ "For sale." *The Liberal*, October 12 1933.

²⁵ "For sale." *The Liberal*, September 17 1936.

²⁶ "For sale." *The Liberal*, February 20 1941.

²⁷ "For sale." *The Liberal*, December 6 1945.

²⁸ "For sale." *The Liberal*, August 2 1934.

²⁹ "For sale." *The Liberal*, April 22 1948.

³⁰ "Wanted." *The Liberal*, July 16 1936.

³¹ *Ontario Probate Records*. Whitchurch Township, York County. Accessed via Family Search.

³² "Building Styles." Victorian. Accessed May 2, 2024.

<http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/Victorian.htm#:~:text=In%20Ontario%2C%20a%20Victorian%20style,of%20Classical%20and%20Gothic%20motifs.>

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verandah is clad in vinyl and features the house's principal doorway. Visual inspection of the house suggests that the verandah was previously uncovered; it has a brick foundation with brick bases for porch posts. A second hip-roofed enclosed verandah is located in the ell of the house on the south (side) façade.

On all elevations, the building features segmental-arched window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills. On the front (west) façade, there is a rectangular projecting bay that extends from the foundation to the gable. Within the bay and gable, there is a roundel attic window with a wooden surround and brick voussoir. With the exception of the roundel attic window, all window units appear to be vinyl replacements. The window openings on the second story feature metal awnings.

Context

The Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street is located on the east side of Yonge Street, north of Stouffville Road, and within the predominantly rural landscape on northern Yonge Street between the hamlets of Jefferson and Oak Ridges. The house's scale and prominent location atop a small hill make it a visual anchor in the surrounding context. Until the mid- to late 20th century, Yonge Street north of Stouffville was largely agricultural, and at the time of its construction, the subject building was surrounded by forested land and other farms.

The subject property's immediate surrounding context includes a mixture of uses and building forms. Immediately south of the subject property there is a small mid-20th-century residential subdivision, south of which is located a large tract of agricultural and forested land. The west side of Yonge Street features 21st century commercial plazas with surface parking, west of which there is a large 21st century residential subdivision. The subject property is also located within the Oak Ridges moraine; there is forested land surrounding the property to the north and east, and Bond Lake is located north of the property.

Nearby historical structures include the Francis A. Legge House at 12261 Yonge Street (circa 1916), the Metropolitan Railway Arrestor House at 12485 Yonge Street (circa 1899), the J.H.C. Durham Cobblestone Cottage at 12761 Yonge Street (circa 1915), 12764 Yonge Street (circa 1920), 12500 Yonge Street (circa 1910), the Metropolitan Railway Arrestor House at 12485 Yonge Street (circa 1899), the Durham-Mitchell House at 12800 Yonge Street (circa 1924), and the John Beverly Robinson Cottage at 12461 Yonge Street (circa 1836).

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.

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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.

Built circa 1893, the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street has design and physical value as a representative example of the vernacular late-Victorian farmhouse architectural style. The Ryan-Paxton House is a two-storey frame structure with red brick veneer and an irregular building footprint. Architectural features that contribute to the house's vernacular late-Victorian farmhouse architectural style include its two-storey massing, frame construction with brick veneer, rubble stone foundation, complex cross-gabled roof, projecting bay, hip-roofed verandahs, and decorative roundel attic window.

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 Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street has historical and associative value for its direct associations with the Ryan-Paxton family, who lived and farmed on the subject property from 1884 to 1991. The Ryan-Paxtons purchased the property and likely built the subject house around 1893 and farmed 145 acres in Whitchurch Township in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The family showed longstanding involvement in the agricultural community along northern Yonge Street, and are a typical example of a multi-generational 19th and early 20th century farming family.

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

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

N/A

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

The subject property at 12345 Yonge Street has contextual value for its visual and historic links to the surrounding landscape on northern Yonge Street, which maintains a predominantly rural character. The Ryan-Paxton House was built circa 1893, when it was located between the hamlets of Jefferson and Oak Ridges and was surrounded by agricultural and forested land. Although the surrounding context experienced some commercial and residential development in the late-20th and early-21st centuries, the property retains visual and historical connections to the surrounding landscape, which includes agricultural and forested land to the north, south, and east, and Bond Lake to the north.

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

N/A

Maps and Photographs



Figure 1 1951 topographic map showing the approximate location of the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street (in red). Note the area's sparse development and farmland concentrated on either side of Yonge Street. (Source: Department of Energy, Mines, and Resources)

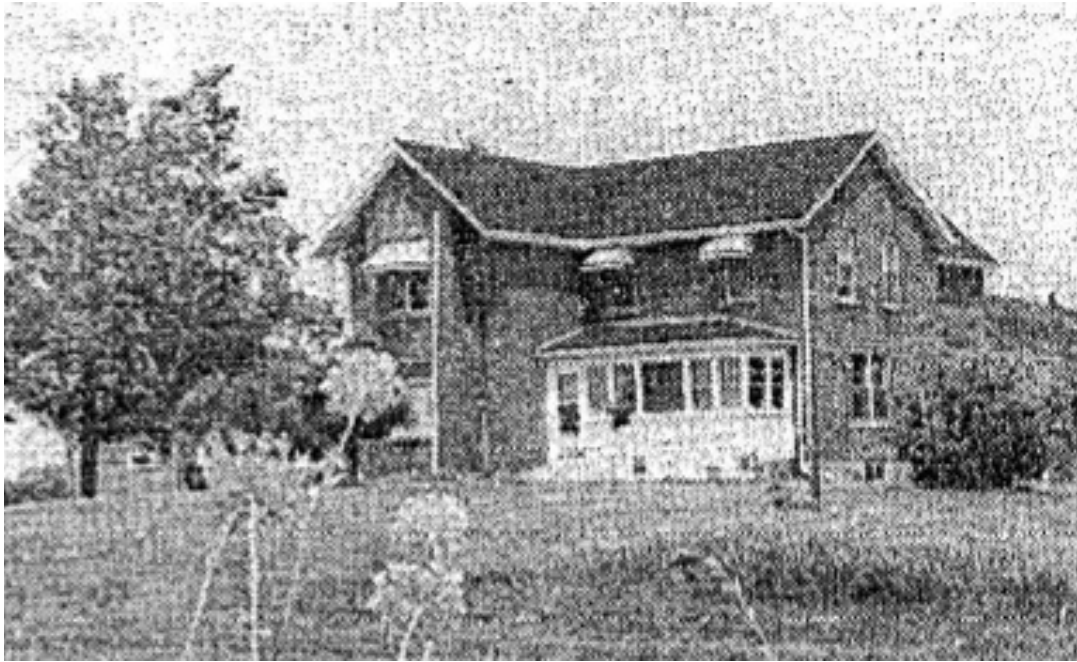


Figure 2 Circa 1984 photograph of the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street, showing the building's principal (west) elevation. Note the building's 2-storey massing, red brick veneer, complex cross-gabled roof, projecting bay, hipped-roof verandah, and roundel attic window. (Source: Toronto Star)



Figure 3 Current photograph of the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street, showing the building's principal (west) elevation. Note the building's 2-storey massing, red brick veneer, complex cross-gabled roof, projecting bay, enclosed hipped-roof front verandah, and roundel attic window. (Source: HUD, 2024)



Figure 4 Current photograph of the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street, showing the building's south (side) elevation. Note the building's cross-gabled roof and enclosed hip-roofed side (south) verandah. (Source: HUD, 2024)



Figure 5 Current photograph of the Ryan-Paxton House at 12345 Yonge Street facing east. Note the surrounding context, including the sparse development and thick vegetation. (Source: HUD, 2024)

Sources

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"A whole way of life not to be written." *Toronto Star*, July 31 1984.

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