

## Heritage Research and Evaluation Report



### **159 Mill Street – Thomas Smith House**

Circa 1850s

Part of Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township

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

## **History**

### **Contextual History**

The Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill 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. 159 Mill Street is located within the former Lot 48, Concession 1 in Vaughan Township, which is associated with nineteenth century industrial and agricultural development along Mill Street on the outskirts of Richmond Hill. Over the course of its life, the subject property has been called Lot 48 Concession 1, Lot 43 on 48, and 159 Mill Street.

### 159 Mill Street

According to Land Registry records, the first owner of Lot 48, Concession 1 in Vaughan Township was Edward Stookes, who was granted the 210-acre lot from the Crown in 1823. In 1830, the Stookes family sold 200 acres of the property to Miles Langstaff. Over the next two decades, the property was subdivided into smaller parcels, and in 1852, the Langstaff family sold 5 acres in the Lot's east half to Thomas Smith.<sup>1</sup> The 1851 census (which was not collected in Canada West – now Ontario - until 1852) confirms that Smith lived on Lot 48 Concession 1, and that he operated a farm on the property that year.<sup>2</sup> According to the 1861 census, Smith lived in a one-storey frame structure, a description matching the subject building.<sup>3</sup>

In 1867, Smith sold the 5-acre property to Dr. John Duncumb.<sup>4</sup> During the Duncumb family's 13-year ownership, the property was used as an income property and was rented out to tenants.<sup>5</sup> Archival records feature newspaper advertisements for the sale and rental of various Duncumb-owned properties.<sup>6</sup>

According to land registry records, the Duncumb family sold the property to James Whelan in 1880, who resold it to Christopher Duncumb, John Duncumb's nephew and heir, in 1881. By 1881, the subject parcel was called Lot 43 on 48. Christopher Duncumb resold Lot 43 the same year to Francis Keall, who also purchased the adjoining Lots 44, 45, and the east part of 49.<sup>7</sup> Archival records indicate that Keall resided on the subject property. Keall is listed as a freeholder<sup>8</sup> on Lot 43 in the 1881 and 1891 voter's lists,<sup>9</sup> and the 1891 census confirms that Keall lived in a one-storey wooden house with his daughter, Mary, and son-in-law, John Empringham.<sup>10</sup>

After Keall's death in 1894,<sup>11</sup> the property was granted to John and Mary Empringham.<sup>12</sup> According to the 1901 census, the Empringhams lived in a one-storey, seven-room house on the north side of Mill Street, a description matching the subject property.<sup>13</sup>

Subsequent owners of the property include Herbert Fisher in 1912, Harry Armstrong in 1942, Cecil Watson in 1943, and Alexander Mackenzie in 1951.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

<sup>2</sup> *Census of Canada West*, 1851.

<sup>3</sup> *Census of Canada West*, 1861.

<sup>4</sup> *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

<sup>5</sup> "Important Credit Sale," *The York Herald*, Jan. 29, 1880.

<sup>6</sup> "To Rent!" *The York Herald*, Aug. 11, 1881.

<sup>7</sup> *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

<sup>8</sup> Property owner

<sup>9</sup> *List of Voters for the Village of Richmond Hill*, Richmond Hill: Liberal Printing and Publishing House, 1881, 1891.

<sup>10</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1891.

<sup>11</sup> "Deaths." *The Liberal*, March 15 1894.

<sup>12</sup> *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

<sup>13</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1901.

<sup>14</sup> *Ontario Land Registry Historical Books*. York Region: Lot 48, Concession 1, Vaughan Township.

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It is believed that Thomas Smith built the subject house in the 1850s. For one, it is unlikely that the structure was constructed prior to Smith's purchase in 1852, as the Langstaff family had already built a house on the northeast portion of Lot 48 in 1849.<sup>15</sup> The house, therefore, was likely built after Thomas Smith's 1852 purchase of the property.

According to the 1861 census, Smith was living in a one-storey frame structure, which matches the subject building's description.<sup>16</sup> According to archival evidence, then, Smith either built the subject building shortly after buying the property in 1852, or he built a temporary structure in the early 1850s and replaced it with the subject house before 1861. Regardless, archival records indicate that Thomas Smith most likely built the house sometime in the 1850s.

### Thomas Smith

Thomas Smith and the Smith family were early settlers in Richmond Hill who settled on Mill Street in 1852 and built the subject house in the 1850s. The family owned, lived, and farmed on the property until 1867, and in that time, were active members of the community.

Thomas Smith was born in England around 1791 and emigrated to Canada sometime before 1852. Census records show that the Smith family, consisting of Thomas, his wife Roseann, and their children, lived on Mill Street in a one-storey frame house and belonged to the Church of England.<sup>17</sup>

According to the 1861 census, Smith was a sawmiller,<sup>18</sup> and newspaper documentation gives insight into where Smith worked. According to an 1861 advertisement in the *York Herald*, Thomas Smith lost a pocketbook, which contained lumber account cheques and two dollars, "between the Saw-Mill on Mill Street and Mr. Patterson's farm, Yonge Street."<sup>19</sup> The advertisement suggests, then, that Smith worked at the Mill Street sawmill.

Census records also show that that the family farmed the subject property. According to the 1851 census, the farm grew peas, oats, and had twelve pigs, six calves, three horses, and a cow.<sup>20</sup> By 1861, the farm supported six pigs, five horses and two cows.<sup>21</sup>

Archival records show that Thomas Smith was highly involved in the mid-nineteenth century Richmond Hill political community. In 1860, Smith was one of several freeholders<sup>22</sup> in Vaughan township to publicly call for a public meeting to discuss the

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<sup>15</sup> Stamp, Robert M. *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History of the Community to 1930*. Richmond Hill: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> *Census of Canada West*, 1861.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "Lost." *York Herald*, November 22 1861.

<sup>20</sup> *Census of Canada West*, 1851.

<sup>21</sup> *Census of Canada West*, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> Property owners.

establishment of township side roads.<sup>23</sup> Smith's political involvement continued in the next few years, and he was elected as a Pathmaster on the Vaughan Council in 1861<sup>24</sup> and 1863.<sup>25</sup>

### Keall-Empringham Family

The Keall-Empringham family owned and lived on Lot 43 from 1881 to 1912. During the family's longtime stewardship of the subject property, they ran a 12-acre farm on adjoining Lots 44, 45, and the east part of 49. The Keall-Empringham farm is representative of late nineteenth and early twentieth century settlement along Mill Street, which was on the outskirts of Richmond Hill and included small farms, sparse development, and industrial properties powered by the Mill Pond and Upper East Don River.

The subject property was first purchased by Francis Keall in 1881. According to archival documentation, Keall was born in England in 1815, and emigrated to Canada and settled in Richmond Hill with his wife, Sarah, sometime before 1860.<sup>26</sup> In Richmond Hill, Keall had different occupations. The 1871 census shows that Keall was a labourer, and according to the *York Herald*, completed roadwork around the village alongside another Richmond Hill resident, James Daniels, in 1873.<sup>27</sup> By 1881, Keall was working as a gardener and retired by 1891.<sup>28</sup>

Keall's daughter and son-in-law, Mary and John Empringham, lived on the small farm that included Lot 43 on Mill Street starting in 1881.<sup>29</sup> Mary was born around 1866 and married John, a farmer from Scarborough, in 1874.<sup>30</sup> After Keall's death in 1894, the property was granted to Mary and John, who lived there until 1912.<sup>31</sup>

According to archival documentation, the Keall-Empringham property was a small farm for the duration of the family's tenure. When Francis Keall purchased the 5-acre property in 1881, he also purchased adjoining lots to create a larger 12-acre property. As well, census records consistently list John Empringham as a farmer,<sup>32</sup> and in 1888, *The Liberal* lauded him for successfully growing 74 peapods from one single pea.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Requisition to the Municipality of Vaughan." *York Herald*, January 27 1860.

<sup>24</sup> "Vaughan Council." *York Herald*, April 5 1861.

<sup>25</sup> "Vaughan Council." *York Herald*, April 10 1863.

<sup>26</sup> "Letters." *York Herald*, August 3 1860; *Census of Canada*, 1871.

<sup>27</sup> "Village council." *York Herald*, November 7 1873.

<sup>28</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1891.

<sup>29</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1881.

<sup>30</sup> "Married." *York Herald*, March 6 1874.

<sup>31</sup> "Deaths." *The Liberal*, March 15 1894.

<sup>32</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.

<sup>33</sup> "A heavy yield." *The Liberal*, August 16 1888.

### Architecture

The Thomas Smith House, built circa 1850s, is a rare surviving example of the Ontario Cottage style in Richmond Hill.

The Ontario Cottage, a vernacular type of Regency structure,<sup>34</sup> was an exceptionally popular residential architectural style in Ontario from about 1820 to 1880. Ontario Cottage houses are small, modest, and made of simple materials, which made it a popular style amongst rural populations with limited resources. While Ontario Cottages share many features with Regency cottages, including their massing, symmetry, and hipped roofs, they tend to be less ornate than Regency structures. The Thomas Smith House is an example of the Ontario Cottage style because of elements like its modest one-storey massing with hipped roof, rectangular plan, deep eaves, and three-bay front façade with a centered doorway.<sup>35</sup>

The Thomas Smith House consists of an original building and a rear addition. The structure fronts Mill Street and features a substantial is set back from the road. The original part of the building, built circa 1850s, is a one-storey frame structure with a rectangular footprint and a low, medium-pitched hipped roof. The structure also features wide eaves, clapboard siding and a red brick chimney on the east elevation.

The front (south) façade is symmetrical and features a three-bay configuration. There is a centered flat-headed doorway surrounded by paned half-sidelights. There are two large, rectangular windows on either side of the doorway.

The windows on all elevations are large, flat-headed window openings with wood surrounds and rectangular 12-over-12 vinyl hung window units. The windows on the front (south) façade also feature vinyl shutters.

On the rear (north) elevation, there is a one-storey frame addition built before 1954.<sup>36</sup>

### Context

The Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street is located on the north side of Mill Street, west of Evahill Crescent. It is part of Richmond Hill's historic village core, which developed starting in the early nineteenth century around Yonge Street. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the property was located on the outskirts of Richmond Hill and was surrounded by small farms, sparse development and industrial properties powered by the Mill Pond and Upper East Don River.

The dwelling is part of an eclectic mixture of housing styles and ages on Mill Street, dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The streetscape is defined by

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<sup>34</sup> "Building Types." Cottage. Accessed May 9, 2024.

<http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/cottage.htm#ontariocottage>.

<sup>35</sup> Macrae, Marion, Anthony Adamson, and Page Toles. *The ancestral roof: Domestic Architecture of Upper Canada*. Toronto, 1967; "Architectural Styles." Markham. Accessed May 9, 2024.

<https://www.markham.ca/wps/wcm/connect/MarkhamContent/Markham/about/markham-heritage/architectural-styles/>.

<sup>36</sup> "York Maps Historical Imagery - 1954." *York Region*, 2024.

a consistent setback of houses with mature trees in front yards lining the street on both sides. The trees, shrubbery, gardens and picket fence in front of the house all contribute to an enclave of greenspace within the surrounding streetscape.

Nearby buildings that contribute to the historic village character of the streetscape include the Gertrude Grant House at 73 Mill Street (circa 1920), the Jesse Dewsbury at 81 Mill Street (circa 1923), 82 Mill Street (circa 1946), the Nicholas Johnson House at 164 Mill Street (circa 1845), the Log House at 184 Mill Street (circa 19<sup>th</sup> century), the Langstaff Mill Worker's Cottage at 249 Mill Street (circa 1850), and the Abraham Ransom House at 64 Powell Street (circa 1850).

### **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.**

The Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street, built circa the 1850s, has physical and design value as a rare surviving example of the Ontario Cottage style in Richmond Hill. The Thomas Smith House consists of a one-storey frame structure and a rear addition. Architectural features that contribute to the Ontario Cottage style include its modest one-storey massing, its low, medium-pitched hipped roof with wide eaves, and its symmetrical three bay front façade with a centered doorway.

#### **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 Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street has historical and associative value for its association with Thomas Smith, who lived on the property between 1852 and 1867.

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Smith was an early settler in the Richmond Hill community and contributed to its development by building the subject house in the 1850s. Smith was a sawmiller by trade and was elected Pathmaster in Vaughan township in 1861 and 1863. During his tenure at the subject property, he also ran a small farm.

The Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street also has historical and associative value for its association with the Keall-Empringham family, who owned, lived at, and ran a farm at the subject property from 1881 to 1912. The Keall-Empringham's longstanding agricultural activity is indicative and representative of nineteenth and early twentieth century life on Mill Street, then located on the outskirts of early Richmond Hill village.

**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.**

N/A

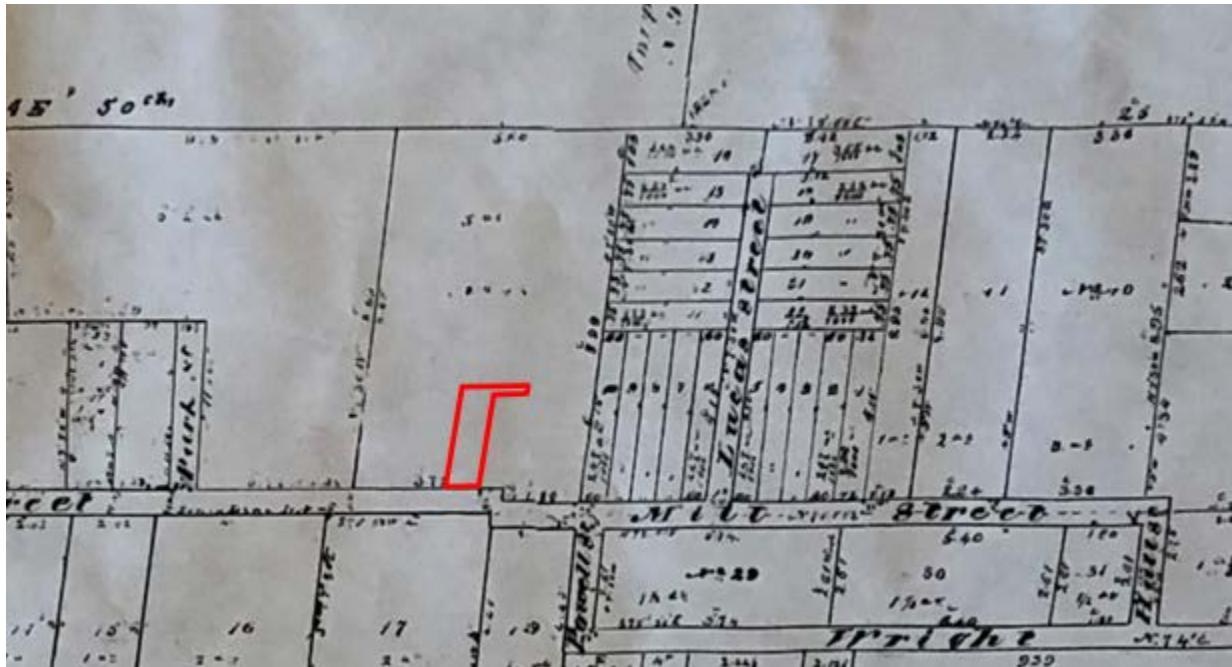
**8. The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.**

The Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street has contextual value because it is functionally and historically linked to its surroundings on Mill Street. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mill Street was located on the outskirts of Richmond Hill village and featured residential buildings mixed with industrial and agricultural properties. The Thomas Smith House has historic and functional links to Mill Street because of its longtime use as a farm. As well, the house has links to Mill Street's industrial past as the house was built for Thomas Smith, who worked at the nearby sawmill on the Upper East Don River.

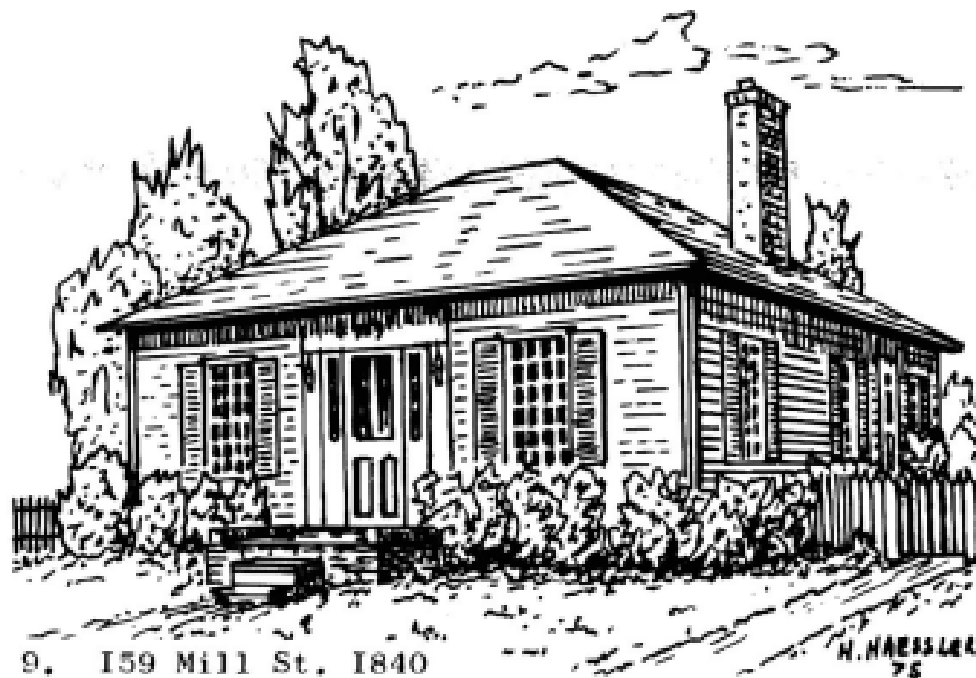
**9. The property has contextual value because it is a landmark.**

N/A

## Maps and Photographs



**Figure 1** Detail of the 1879 Gibson Plan showing the approximate location of the Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street (indicated in red). Note that in 1879, the subject property was owned by Dr. Duncumb and consisted of Lot 43 on Lot 48, Concession 1 of Vaughan Township. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library)



**Figure 2** Circa 1975 sketch of the Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street. Note the structure's one storey massing, frame construction, medium-sloped hipped roof, symmetrical three-bay front façade, central doorway with half-sidelights, and 12-over-12 windows. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library)





**Figure 3** 1978 photograph of the Thomas Smith House 159 Mill Street. Note the structure's one storey massing, frame construction, medium-sloped hipped roof, symmetrical three-bay front façade, central doorway with half-sidelights, and 12-over-12 windows. (Source: Richmond Hill LACAC)



**Figure 4** Circa 1943 photograph looking west on Mill Street, east of Bridgeford Street, showing the surrounding historical context along Mill Street. Note the surrounding rural landscape, sparse development, and heavily-treed streetscape. Note that the Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street is approximately one block east of the subject photograph. (Source: Richmond Hill Public Library)



**Figure 5** Current photograph of the Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street looking north, showing the structure's front (south) elevation. Note the structure's one storey massing, frame construction, medium-sloped hipped roof, symmetrical three-bay front façade, central doorway with half-sidelights, and 12-over-12 windows. (Source: HUD 2024)



**Figure 6** Current photograph of the Thomas Smith House at 159 Mill Street looking northwest, showing the structure's village core context along Mill Street. Note the surrounding heavily-treed streetscape. (Source: HUD 2024)

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