

34 Baldwin Street, Dundas, Constructed circa 1808



Preliminary Evaluation of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest:

(In accordance with Ontario Regulation 9/06, as amended by Ontario Regulation 569/22)

Design or Physical Value

1. The one-and-a-half storey frame structure located at 34 Baldwin Street, Dundas, was constructed circa 1808. The property has physical value as an early and representative example of a vernacular early-nineteenth century frame structure with influences from the Georgian Revival style of architecture. It is a rectangular, one-and-a-half storey building with two rectangular twentieth-century one-storey wings on the east and west elevations, respectively. The building retains many features typical of early-nineteenth century vernacular and Georgian influenced architecture, including its: symmetrical three bay façade; low side gable roof with shallow projecting plain eaves; flat-headed window and door openings; two hung windows below the side gables of both the east and western elevations; symmetrical five bay main storey on the rear (south) elevation; and stone foundation. The property is also unique, as the home's construction is embedded

in the raised topography of the property creating the illusion of a two-storey building in the present-day rear (historic front) of the property.

Sometime after 1896, likely in the early-twentieth century when the property was subdivided, the building was renovated to have the main entrance face Baldwin Street, at which point the present-day front porch was likely added. During the early- to mid-twentieth century, two small wings were constructed on both the eastern and western sides of the building, neither of which are considered to be of heritage value. Prior to 1950, two dormers were also added, including a small dormer on the northern roof elevation and a wide central dormer on the southern side of the roof, neither of which are considered to be of heritage value.

2. The property does not display a high degree of craftsmanship.
3. The property does not demonstrate a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.

Historical or Associative Value

4. The property has historical value due to its association with early and prominent Dundas residents and events, including the Lesslie family, William Lyon Mackenzie, and Laurent Quetton St. George. The property's built history begins with Laurent Quetton St. George (1771-1819), an early French settler who had purchased land in Dundas beginning in 1809, including the block on which 34 Baldwin Street is located from William Hare in 1812. Quetton was a wealthy, well-connected, and successful merchant with a wide trade network across the province, who purchased property in Dundas as part of his business expansion. While Quetton did not reside in Dundas and his tenure in Canada was short lived, since he left 1816, his influence in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century can be seen on an 1827 map where Baldwin Street is called St. George Street.

In Quetton's absence, the property was managed as an outpost of his business first by David Hays (birth and death unknown), followed by Hector S. MacKay (circa 1770/1780 - circa 1820). The earliest probable reference to the house identified to date comes from a letter dated to November 28, 1808, where MacKay wrote that he was awaiting on an answer respecting a house at Dundas Mills which he was promised. Who precisely constructed the building is unknown, and as such it is important to note that prior to 1834 the use of forced labour by upper-class persons was a commonplace occurrence, meaning that it is possible for the property to have been constructed using indentured or forced labour.

The next known historic reference to the property comes on May 18, 1822, in the form of a lease to William Lyon Mackenzie (1794-1861) and John Lesslie (1801-1882) from Quetton's estate. In this lease, the property is described as old, and a series of renovations are noted implying that the property had been abandoned

by MacKay for some time prior to Mackenzie and Lesslie's arrival. The connection between the Lesslies and William Lyon Mackenzie is significant, given that Mackenzie immigrated to Canada from Scotland as an employee of Edward Lesslie (John's father) before establishing his own business. While Mackenzie only lived at 34 Baldwin Street for 2 years, he would go on to become an important political figure in Upper Canada as the owner of a successful newspaper, the leader of the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837, and the first Mayor of Toronto in 1834. Mackenzie was highly critical of Upper Canadian governance, coining the term 'Family Compact' which would be used to describe the small aristocracy of conservative and wealthy individuals which controlled the provincial government at the time. Mackenzie's extreme views for a government modelled off of the American government was supported by a large base of American migrants (Late-Loyalists) and opposed by concerned Black communities in Canada who feared this reform may lead to the return of slavery. While they disagreed on certain proceedings, the Lesslie family, notably including John and James Lesslie (1802-1885), were known supporters of Mackenzie's political ideologies, and played important roles locally and provincially in advocating for government reform.

Edward Lesslie (1765-1828) and the remainder of the Lesslies arrived in Dundas circa 1823, joining John. While living in Dundas Edward quickly rose to become an important political figure, working to grow and expand his business which John and Mackenzie had laid the groundworks for locally prior to his arrival, and expanding his business via his sons who would go on to manage branches of the business across the province. Like many other wealthy immigrants at the time, all of the eligible Lesslie men including Edward, John, James, and William (1804-1843) submitted petitions for land in the Coote's Paradise town plot and purchased land in the area, which would quickly transform the Lesslie family into one of the biggest landowners and most prolific families in the area. Following Edward's death his wife Grace Lesslie (1776-1853) took over management of the property. She likely stayed on the property until her death, given that the text in her will states that she was still residing at 34 Baldwin Street 'as of late'. Local history and legends report that in the years prior to, during, and following the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion, William Lyon Mackenzie would stay with the Lesslies at this property when he would visit Dundas. If this is true, it would mean that he was hosted by Grace during his stays in the town. Sometime shortly following Grace's death John returned to the property – continuing to live there for over a decade, moving away and using the property as a rental by 1874. Following John's death his sister Helen (1813-1897) inherited the property – which she continued to lease until her death at which point the property was sold to members of the Bibby family.

5. The property has the potential to yield information that contributes to an understanding of the early development of the Town of Dundas, including the creation of the Desjardins Canal, as well as nineteenth-century politics in Upper Canada including the Upper Canada Rebellion.

6. The property does not demonstrate or reflect the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant in the community.

Contextual Value

7. The property is important in defining the character of this area. Located in a block immediately adjacent to the original town plan of Coote's Paradise and nearby other important historic buildings and geographic features like the historic Dundas Town Hall and Spencer Creek, the property at 34 Baldwin Street plays an important role in defining the early nineteenth-century landscape of south-eastern Dundas. The property's proximity to Spencer Creek and the Desjardins Canal also speaks to Dundas's early industrial history, at a time when wealthy immigrants were rapidly arriving across Southern Ontario, actively competing with neighbouring townships to become political and economic leaders.
8. The property is visually, physically, and historically linked to its surroundings. Baldwin Street, on which the property is located, was originally named St. George Street after the property's early owner, Quetton St. George. The street's name was changed to Baldwin sometime after 1827 after William Warren Baldwin (1775-1844), who was the executor of Quetton's estate.

Over the years the property has undergone a number of major renovations. The property was originally oriented so that the southern elevation facing Dundas Street, which is now the rear, was the front of the property. At this time, this southern façade featured a porch which lined the full width of the building. A photograph from 1896 shows the building having also featured an enclosed entryway embedded in the historic porch at this time, leading to a landscaped entryway towards Dundas Street. At this time, the building may have been covered in wood siding, although this is not clear from the available resources, and featured eight-over-eight hung windows with shutters on either side. The history of the building's renovations is directly connected to that of Dundas's urban intensification in the early-twentieth century as the area around the property changed from a rural to residential landscape. Visually, the building's deep setback and construction being physically embedded into the property's raised topography along with its deep setback contributes to an understanding of early colonial European settlement patterns.

9. The property is considered to be a local landmark. Having been featured in local books, booklets, news articles, and historical interpretive materials from the late nineteenth century onwards for its associations with William Lyon Mackenzie, the property has had a high profile as an important local landmark.

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