

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sarah King Head, CAHP, was contracted by Heritage Thorold LACAC in May 2024 to conduct a Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report (CHER) on the property and structure at 18 River Street, Port Robinson, City of Thorold, Regional Municipality of Niagara, Province of Ontario, Canada.

The primary purpose of this report is to provide an independent and objective cultural heritage documentary and assessment report of the property and structure, which involves examination of, recourse with and interpretation of archival, land registry, mapping, historic community, secondary interpretative, and other resources. In so doing, the report is intended to assist in determining the cultural heritage value or interest (CHVI) of the Subject Site within the context of the Port Robinson East Special Policy (City of Thorold Official Plan, B2.5). A single site visit was conducted in late May 2024.

Interpretation of the research is presented in this report: it shows sustained European land-use activity dating back to the late eighteenth century when a Crown grant of lands was made to John Carl as compensation for his loyalty during the American Revolutionary wars. Before this, Indigenous land-use activity can be linked to the area for as many as 13,000 years. From the early nineteenth century the area that is now Port Robinson has been the site of a range of industrial, commercial and residential activities.

The information contained in this report is intended for the client and represents the professional opinion of Sarah King Head, CAHP. Any third-party use is therefore at their discretion therein.

DESCRIPTION of HISTORIC PLACE

1. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Subject Site is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples and is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabek, and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected to Upper Canada Treaties and protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum agreement. The area continues to be home to diverse Indigenous First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples who remain stewards of the land.

2. LOCATION

Historically located in lot 1 on the east side of Front Street in the geographic Township of Thorold's Broken Front lot 203 in the County of Welland, Ontario, the Subject Site at 18 River Street is today part of the Port Robinson East community in the Regional Municipality of Thorold, Niagara Region. On Plan M-10 (1976) it is identified as lot 20-3, one lot south of the intersection of River (formerly Front) and Bridge (formerly Welland) streets.

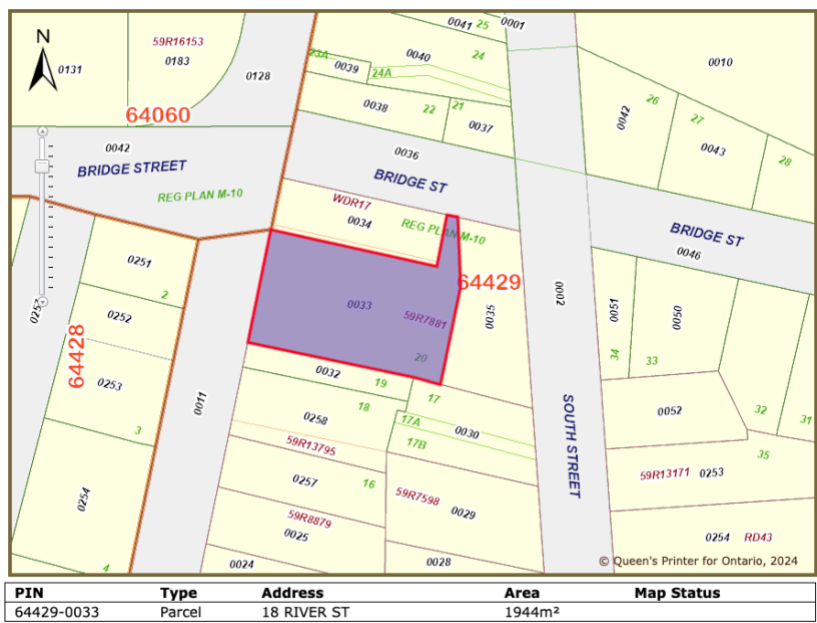


Detail showing approximate location of 18 River Street, Port Robinson (Plan M-10, 1976)

The Subject Site has important heritage value for being part of the first property purchased by Niagara-on-the-Lake's Duncan McFarland along the Welland Canal. In 1832, he bought the one-acre parallelogram-shaped lot from Alexander McDonnell, who had previously purchased a portion of lands not required by the

Welland Canal Company a year earlier.¹ Four years later McFarland bought most of the land in the adjoining Township lot 202 from Benjamin Canby – and subsequently set to subdividing lands into what would become the village of Port Robinson (registered in 1854).

Today 18 River Street measures 1944m²; the original 3732m² parcel having been subject to severances over the past two centuries. The original one-acre lot was bounded to the north by Bridge Street, to the west by River Street and to the east by South Street South. Today, the severed lot is south of 22 River Street to the northwest while an unnumbered lot occupies the southeast corner of the intersection of South Street South and Bridge Street (directly north of 15 South Street South and opposite 65 and 75 Bridge Street East).



18 River Street (LRO 59)

The property at 18 River Street is located within the Port Robinson East community and as such is protected by the City of Thorold’s Official Plan by a *Special Policy* (B2.5). It is a rural area with ‘historic’ value that has been cocooned from east–west traffic since 1974 when its lift bridge spanning the

¹ The LRO 59 (Niagara South) PIN associated with 18 River Street is 64429-0033 but the original McFarland property also included parcels now known as 64429-0034 to the north (today 22 River Street) and the unnumbered property at the northeast corner of Bridge Street and South Street South (64429-0035).

Welland Canal was destroyed by the *SS Steelton*. Notably, the Subject Site is located within less than half of one kilometre of that relict bridge.

Schedule A-4 of the Official Plan further identifies two distinct Environmental Protection areas to the south and east of the Subject Site as well as Open Spaces & Parks lands surrounding the entire enclave of historic Port Robinson. The area is further enhanced by being located within a wooded area acknowledged to be part of a provincially significant wetland, with the East Port Robinson Slough Forest slightly more than one km to the northeast.²

The Duncan McFarland-Saunders House is a western facing two-storey brick building that was designed in the Italianate style in c. 1860 to replace an earlier house that was destroyed by fire at an unknown date but that had been constructed in the same location after he had completed the purchase of much of the land encompassing the canal community in 1836.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This CHER considers 18 River Street, (c. 1860), a property identified by Heritage Thorold as having cultural heritage value or interest as per O.Reg. 9/06 criteria under the *OHA*.

For the purposes of this report, the term ‘cultural heritage resource’ is used to describe tangible built and landscape heritage features. In this way, the structure at 18 River Street has CHVI through its association with the land-use activities related to historical settlement and patterns of architectural development and by its ability to contribute to the heritage value and integrity of the City of Thorold as a whole and within the context of its specific neighbourhood surroundings in Port Robinson.

Relevant legislation and policies will be considered.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

Ontario Heritage Act (R.S.O. 1990, c O.18), 2024

Introduced by the province in 2006, the *Ontario Heritage Act (OHA)* provides a uniform set of criteria for municipalities to use when determining whether a property should be considered a significant cultural heritage resource. It provides a legislative and regulatory framework for heritage conservation, protection and preservation. While Part IV of the *Act* allows municipalities to designate individual properties based on their fulfilment of a minimum of two of the nine O.Reg. 9/06 criteria, Part V enables them to designate a

² City of Thorold Official Plan, p. 242.

defined area as a heritage conservation district (HCD). Part IV designations are intended to protect individual properties and provide a long-term plan for managing change therein.³ They are subject to OHA Part IV controls (per O.Reg. 9/06 criteria) as regards applications for alteration or demolition.

Bill 23 (More Homes, Built Faster Act) enacted a series of significant changes to the OHA in 2022. Of particular relevance to the Subject Site, Section 27 expands the threshold of one to two of the nine O.Reg. 9/06 criteria for any individual property to be considered eligible for designation under the Act.

Further changes were introduced on 6 June 2024 through *Bill 200 (Homeowner Protection Act)* that address matters related to non-designated or 'listed' or non-designated heritage properties included on municipal registers – principally by extending the deadline for municipalities to issue notices of intention to designate (NOID) to 1 January 2027. The *Bill* provides for the voluntary removal of listed properties.

In spite of its obvious heritage value, the property at 18 River Street has never been included in either the City of Thorold's Heritage Index (2017) or its Potential Heritage Index (2016).⁴

Provincial Policy Statement, 2024

Changes to the *Planning Act* through *Bill 185 (Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act)* has impacted the *Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)* since 1 July 2024. Providing policy direction by regulating efficient land-use planning and development in Ontario, the *PPS*'s goal is to promote sustainable, economically viable and strong communities as well as to protect the environment and support public health and safety. Key is the identification of upper-tier municipalities – including those in the Niagara Region which are considered among the largest and fastest growing in the province and as such has the capacity to fulfil support strategic growth and minimum density targets.

Section 4.6 of the *PPS* provides the framework for regulating the development and use of land as regards cultural heritage and archaeological resources. The first subsection (4.6.1) provides for the conservation of 'protected heritage property'.

City of Thorold Official Plan, 2016

The City of Thorold's *Official Plan* provides policy direction regarding the preservation of built heritage. Overall, it supports the conservation of its rich cultural heritage

³ See *Ontario Heritage Tool Kit: HCDs*, p. 8.

⁴ See <https://heritagethorold.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/THOROLD-HERITAGE-INDEX-Designated-Apr5-2017.pdf> and <https://heritagethorold.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/THOROLD-HERITAGE-INDEX-Potential-Nov2016.pdf>

attributes and values as part of a larger mandate for sustainable development that does not deny its historic context.

Section A2.7 outlines the City's commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage by identifying a goal to 'continue to identify, conserve and enhance the City's significant cultural heritage resources' – and outlines seven Objectives largely insofar as they can be seen to benefit future generations and support economic development (s. A2.7.2)

Section D3 focuses specifically on heritage and archaeological resources within the context of land-use planning matters under the aegis of General Development Policies. Herein the City is committed to identifying and protecting heritage buildings and sites that contribute to the character of the community.

Of note, Section D3.2.2.3 outlines the framework for heritage designation under the OHA while the subsequent sections outline identification of heritage conservation areas, preservation of heritage buildings, and impacts associated with development near such structures/areas (D3.2.2.4– D3.2.2.6).

The Port Robinson East Special Policy

Compared with its Secondary Plan for the Port Robinson West Community, section B2.5 of the OP designates the portion of the community that was cut off when the Port Robinson bridge was destroyed by the SS *Steelton* in October 1974, severing the community's principal east–west artery. A decision by the Ministry of Transportation a year later not to rebuild the bridge meant that the east community was effectively isolated, giving rise to a 'historic and stable rural community' that is protected by municipal legislation, ensuring that it not be 'a focus area for future growth in the City' (s. B2.5.1). Within the area delineated by Schedule A-4 the only permitted uses are those that support existing land-use and the community's 'existing character and built form' (s. B2.5.3.1).



Detail of City of Thorold Official Plan, Schedule A-4: Port Robinson East Special Policy Land Use, 2015

NATURAL HERITAGE

Almost exclusively reclaimed industrial lands associated with the First and Second Welland Canals to the west, north and east and by the Welland River to the south, the Subject Site is surrounded by protected Open Spaces & Parks as defined by the Niagara Regional Official Plan's Core Natural Heritage Areas (s. B1.6). As defined by the City's Official Plan these areas are designed to offer residents 'a well-planned and accessible parkland system, which incorporates the principles of active transportation' (s. B1.6.1).

Moreover, 18 River Street is surrounded to the south and east by two Environmental Protection areas Environmental Protection Area One aligns with regional policies directed to significant natural heritage features outside the Greenbelt Plan, including Provincially Significant Life Science Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) while Environmental Protection Area Two reflects policies of conservation of these natural heritage features (viz. A4.3.1–2; and B3.2–B3.3).

A wooded area approximately one kilometre northeast of 18 River Street is part of a provincially significant wetland known as the East Port Robinson Slough Forest.



Detail of City of Thorold Official Plan, Schedule B: Natural Heritage System, 2015

BUILT HERITAGE RESOURCE & CULTURAL HERITAGE DISTRICT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

This section briefly summarizes the history of the study area in the context of cultural heritage resources located above ground. Focus has been relevant primary and secondary source data (including land registry information, community heritage resources, mapping, etc.) that pertains to European land-use activities since the late eighteenth century without disregarding the anthropogenic land-use activities of Indigenous peoples in this area for millennia before the arrival of European settlers.

PHYSIOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The study area falls within the physiographic region between the ridges of the Onondagao and Niagara Escarpment (to the south and north, respectively) that were formed during episodes of climatic warming and water level change. Late Glacial and early Post Glacial period (14,000–10,000 BP) created the subsurface character of the Haldimand Clay Plain area on which the Subject Site is located.⁵ Not only did these factors support the ecological development of woodlands, savannas and swamps associated with the Carolinian Biotic Transition Zone, but it also gave rise to a gently undulating topography caused by the deposition of glacial till moraine conducive to sustained anthropogenic land-use activities in two main ways: first, the presence of glacial lake sediments giving rise to a highly arable substrate; and, second, the incision of multiple waterways and riparian wetlands that are today acknowledged as being part of the provincially significant East Port Robinson Slough Forest wetland.⁶

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This section will provide a historic context for assessing and evaluating the cultural heritage resources of 18 River Street in Port Robinson according to the nine criteria of CHVI (O.Reg. 9/06). An assessment of adjacent heritage resources will be considered before completion of a Statement of Significance.

Indigenous Land-Use Activities

While the scope of this report is not to assess pre-Contact land-use activities, it must be noted that the area had belonged to sovereign Indigenous peoples for millennia

⁵ NPCA, pp. 30–32; Menzies and Taylor, pp. 298–99; Tinkler, 38–40.

⁶ Williamson, 2010, pp. 31–35; and Tinkler, pp. 13–46.

before the arrival of European explorers and settlers. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was inhabited by the Iroquois-speaking Neutral Nation Confederacy; but by 1792, it was under the purview of the Anishinaabec Mississauga Nation.

Physiographical features of the Port Robinson area in terms of its proximity to the distinctive topography associated with the Chippewa Creek (Welland River) are considered to have ‘archaeological potential’ in terms of the identification of pre-Contact Indigenous archaeological remains (as noted above).⁷ Today, the wooded area around 18 River Street is acknowledged to be part of a provincially significant wetland, with the East Port Robinson Slough Forest slightly more than one km to the northeast.⁸

From the seventeenth century French Jesuit missionaries provided an insight into the vibrant and extensive Iroquois-speaking Neutral (Attawandaron) society in the Niagara peninsula; however, by the time refugees fleeing the American Revolution arrived a century and half later, most of that historic population had been reduced by a combination of disease and warfare.⁹

Nonetheless, late eighteenth century European immigrants who came to claim British land grants would still have interacted with relict Indigenous settlements – especially those around prominent waterways like the Chippewa Creek. Moreover, it would have been necessary to rely on the ancient Indigenous arterial infrastructure that criss-crossed the region before the establishment of township grid surveys. Among these networks was that associated with the Beaverdams Trail which extended several kilometres south of the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment at today’s Niagara Falls and extended toward Burlington Bay. It, along with the Iroquois Trail that ran along the Escarpment’s bench, continued to provide an indispensable land route between the Lower and Upper Great Lakes until the middle of the nineteenth century. The importance of these trails cannot be underestimated and have been described as providing ‘probably the major east-west route of eastern North America’.¹⁰

Thorold Township

Negotiations between the British Crown and Mississauga Nation culminated in the Between the Lakes Treaty (no. 3) of 1784, and facilitated the former’s surveying of the territory that was already being distributed to refugee immigrants from the American colonies. These lands in what would become Thorold Township (no. 9) were first

⁷ Williamson, 2010, pp. 31–35.

⁸ City of Thorold Official Plan, p. 242.

⁹ Noble, 1984; and Hughes, 2010.

¹⁰ Burghardt, pp. 422–24.

surveyed by Daniel Hazen in 1788 and then by Augustus Jones in 1791. Immediately hereafter the *Constitutional Act* divided British North America into Upper and Lower Canada, and by 1792 the first Legislative Assembly of the Province of Upper Canada was held at Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake). Within the new administrative and political boundaries, the Township of Thorold became part of the Nassau (later Home) District. Seven years later, the Niagara District was created from Lincoln and Haldimand counties. The *Act of Union* in 1840 further consolidated landholdings to create two electoral ridings: in 1845 the North formally became Lincoln County and the South Welland County, the latter which included Thorold Township. In 1850, this division was abolished and the United Counties of Lincoln, Welland and Haldimand were created.

Crown Grant and Early Ownership Patterns

The property at 18 River Street, Port Robinson, was part of a 240-acre Crown grant of broken front lots 202 and 203 in Thorold Township that was made to John Carl and registered on 1 May 1798. Until the construction began on the Welland Canal in 1824, the area was densely wooded and known locally as the 'hickory bush'. It is recorded that until work began on the Canal the Chippewa Nation had established a settlement on both sides of the river; but that the disruption forced them to relocate to Six Nations on the Haldimand Tract.¹¹ The only permanent dwelling at this time, therefore, was that belonging to John Carl. A second house was built in the vicinity by the Irish-born John Coulter, who had come to work as a contractor on the Canal.

Not until 1830 was the sale of Carl's lands to the Welland Canal Company registered. A year later 'all the lands ... except such portions are required for Canal purposes' were sold to Alexander McDonell for £2500. Although he had been the first postmaster of the community originally known as Port Beverley since 1829, it was not until 1832 that Duncan McFarland was able to secure his foothold when he purchased a single acre of land 'above the waste weir' in July 1832.¹² Seven years later, he extensively expanded his landholdings in the area, including the purchase of lots 201 and 202 from Benjamin Canby and planned a subdivision of what would become the village of Port Robinson.¹³

¹¹ Thompson, pp. 77–78.

¹² LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: Patent, Crown to John Carl, 1 May 1798; B&S, inst. 8365, 17 May 1830 Carl to Welland Canal Company for £742; B&S, inst. 10591, 4 Aug 1831 Welland Canal Company to Alexander McDonell for £2500; B&S, inst. 8857, 5 July 1832 McDonell to Duncan McFarland of 1 acre lot no. 1 above waste weir for £37-10s.

¹³ B&S, Benjamin Canby to Duncan McFarland, 1839 (reg. 7 June 1839), inst. 12529 for £625. Canby sold a single acre to McFarland in 1836 too: inst. 12706, 16 Jan 1836, Canby to McFarland of one acre in the southwest part of Township lot 202.

The hamlet's name change from Port Beverley to Port Robinson still commemorated the same individual: Chief Justice Beverley Robinson who was a senior member of the Welland Canal Company.

Welland Canal

McFarland's interest in Port Robinson was directly linked to the construction of the Welland Canal that had begun a decade earlier when sod was first turned at Allanburg in November 1824. Completed in 1829, Port Robinson served as the principal lock juncture linking the Welland River (Chippewa Creek) flowing from Lake Erie via the Niagara River. In its first incarnation, Port Robinson became the southern terminus with the manmade canal that carried on over the Escarpment to Port Dalhousie where it exited in Lake Ontario. The hamlet retained its prominence even after 1833 when the Canal was extended directly to Port Colborne.

It is probable that McFarland was reluctant to invest too heavily in the Port Robinson area while the Canal remained a private enterprise. Indeed, constant repairs to the original wooden structure meant that the Welland Canal Company faced bankruptcy on several occasions before – by the early 1840s – the Government of Canada intervened and purchased the Company, hereafter overseeing construction of a more sustainable canal built from locally quarried limestone. Other modifications included deepening and widening as well as reducing the number of locks. It was not until plans for a Third Canal in the 1870s that Port Robinson's prominence was eclipsed. The intervening decades saw the community thrive throughout a combination of canal commerce as well as shipbuilding activities. Among the most prominent shipbuilders were the Abbey brothers and it was here at Port Robinson that the contractor John Brown stored almost all of his canal building equipment.

The McFarland Family

The land in Township lots 202 and 203 that would form much of McFarland's subdivision plan for Port Robinson were quickly sold but not always registered after he began buying it from the mid-1830s. The lack of documentation makes determination of provenance complicated as indeed the fact that he did not register the subdivision plan itself until 1854. Notwithstanding the community emerged with prominent businessmen (including McFarland and his wife's Elliot relatives) at the helm.

McFarland's father John (1752–1815) was a Scottish-born entrepreneur who made his fortune as an 'artificer' (engineer) overseeing the repair and occasional construction of the 'King's Batteaux.' Establishing himself financially and socially in the area around Fort Niagara well before the Revolutionary War, he and his family were forced to relocate to the other side of the Niagara River in 1792. Hereafter, the family's wealth was secured through successful land acquisition in and speculation throughout southern Ontario. By 1815, he had acquired nearly 3,000 acres of land throughout the Niagara peninsula, as far north as Beverly

Township and south as Walpole Township.¹⁴ John McFarland died intestate in 1815 several months after having been released from an internment camp in Greenbush NY during the War of 1812.

Duncan (1802–88) was the only son of John McFarland's second marriage to Margaret Willson, the eldest daughter of prominent UEL Beaverdams settler 'Irish' John Willson.¹⁵ Although a decade younger than his older two brothers John Jr and James, Duncan also participated in the War of 1812 as a 'powder monkey' and as such received the £20 gratuity for his services from the government.

The youngest McFarland son married Margaret Elliot in 1827, the daughter of Andrew Elliot and Jane Scott of Port Robinson. Initially operating the general store in nearby Allanburg, McFarland was able to transition over to Port Robinson in 1829, when he was offered the position of the hamlet's fist postmaster and then the Canal's Collector of Customs. Around the time that he began buying up lands in the area, he established a lucrative sawmill with his father-in-law and later son James Elliot McFarland.

In addition to being Justice of the Peace for the community, McFarland served first as a Captain during the Mackenzie uprising in 1837–38 and later as Colonel in the militia helping to police frequent outbreaks of riotous and criminal behaviours along the canal.¹⁶ He was elected to the District Council of Niagara first in 1842 and until 1850 represented Thorold. He stood as a Reform candidate for the United Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada in 1852. Among the other hats he wore was the first President of the Thorold Township Agricultural Society in 1847 and such pursuits were the focus of his attention after he retired from public office in the 1860s and until his death in 1888.

All of Duncan and Margaret McFarland's children married well but his sons remained local: John Cameron became a local doctor and Duncan Elliot continued his father's political and commercial activities. The latter is responsible for building the first house at 10 Canby Street that was rebuilt by Stephen Beatty in 1879.

Village of Port Robinson

¹⁴ Hemmings, *McFarland*, pp. 67 and passim.

¹⁵ Thompson attributes the civil unrest to factionalism between Catholic and Protestant Irishmen as well as racial tensions against the two companies of so-called Coloured Corps (whom McFarland commanded), comprised principally of former African-American slaves (pp. 79–81).

¹⁶ Hemmings, *McFarland*, pp. 110–26.

The remarkable growth and wealth of Port Robinson is most strikingly apparent when comparing population data. Indeed, in 1849, the population was only about 400 people but by 1861 it had swelled to almost 1000. And yet for such a relatively small community (that had only been given the status of police village in 1856), census records show in 1861 an impressive range of building stock including multiple frame and brick houses of at least two storeys. Among the latter, were the homes of McFarland and his son John along with those of Robert Elliot and Franklin Oldfield – although Elliot’s was the largest by a storey. All of these men were merchants or had profited handsomely from supplying materials to the booming Canal commerce: Elliott and Oldfield through wholesale trade while McFarland acquired much of his wealth through his father’s timber interests.¹⁷ Next to St Catharines, Port Robinson was the most to benefit from canal commerce and shipbuilding.

The wealth and economic prospects are attested by the range of commercial and industrial activities at mid-century: from four general stores and five grocery shops to various saddlery, ship chandlery, blacksmith, wagon, paint, jewellery and shoe shops there were butchers, bakeries and pharmacies. Added to this was the Abbey shipyard and dry-docks, a plaster mill, two grist and one sawmill – and even a sealing wax factory.¹⁸

A combination of the naming of county capital at Welland (following the separation of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland) and plans for the construction of the Third Welland Canal (bypassing Port Robinson) in the late 1870s spelled the end to the community’s prosperity and central commercial role. By the end of the century, the dry-docks and shipyard had been closed or relocated while smaller industries including the shingle factory and various mills were either removed, relocated or destroyed by fire. In 1895 the toll office was closed and two years later the customs office was relocated to Welland. By the time Thompson wrote his *Jubilee History* in 1898–99 the population hovered around 500.

SUBJECT SITE

Ownership

The property at 18 River Street in Port Robinson is part of a one-acre sale that was purchased by Duncan McFarland in 1832. Of this, McFarland sold 1/16 of an acre in the northwest corner to the innkeeper Thomas Wigg in 1854.¹⁹ This property was mortgaged several times before being the subject of a Sheriff’s

¹⁷ See McCalla.

¹⁸ Thompson, pp. 81–82.

¹⁹ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: B&S, inst. 1883, 20 April 1854, McFarland to Thomas Wigg for £300; Mortgage, inst. 4060 on 9 Sept 1856 by Wigg to Hill for £400, assigned to Andrew E. Willson (inst. 7216 on 14 April 1859).

Deed and subsequent legal proceedings that culminated in a quitclaim by Frederick Macdonald to Andrew Murray in 1864.²⁰ Four years later Murray's executors sold the 1/16 of an acre to John Saunders for \$1200. This price suggests a building was in situ but two mortgages in 1871 were presumably necessary to finance improvements to what initially was a grocery shop and then 'Saunders Bakery'.²¹

Even though an exact date unknown, the 1861 census indicates that McFarland was living in a two-storey brick house with his family on the larger parcel of the one-acre lot on the east side of Front Street. The only other brick structures in the immediate vicinity were the three-storey Elliot house and the two-storey Oldfield house.²² For this reason, we can reasonably attribute a date of c. 1860 for the second house at 18 River Street. It is not known when the first building was constructed but it is possible that it was soon after McFarland bought the land in 1832 as his son Duncan Elliot's birth was registered in Port Robinson.

The 1861 census shows that the family were living in the two-storey brick house in Port Robinson.

Perhaps in order to recoup expenses associated with its reconstruction, McFarland got a mortgage on the 15/16 section of lot 1 from the younger of his two older half-brothers, James McFarland in 1864.²³ Alternatively, it is possible it was a strategy to provide a home for his two spinster sisters Jean and Margery McFarland; and indeed it was they who inherited all 'but The Saunders Bakery' in lot 1 when James died in 1869.²⁴

Five years later the two McFarland sisters sold the 15/16-acre lot for \$1000, including a house, to Saunders. Saunders promptly got a mortgage for \$1000 from Duncan McFarland and was able to discharge it two years later in 1873. Saunders was, however, not able to meet the terms of the next two

²⁰ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: see insts. 7217, 7218, 7219, 7225; QC, inst. 12898 on 31 October 1864 by Andrew Willson to Andrew Murray for \$100.

²¹ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: Probate, inst. 2018 on 9 Sept 1867 by Robert Elliot and Cornelius B. Bennet (executors of Andrew Murray; B&S, inst. 2294 on 14 Jan 1868, Murray's executors to John Saunders for \$1200; Mortgage, inst. 2295 on 14 Jan 1868 by Saunders to the executors for \$900, discharged in 1871; Mortgage, inst. 467 on 28 Feb 1871 by Saunders to Baruch Tucker for \$400.

²² See https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/1570/images/4391954_00230?pld=800961836

²³ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: Mortgage, inst. 12133 on 9 Feb 1864 by Duncan McFarland to James McFarland for \$2000; Probate, inst. 565 on 27 April 1867 (reg. 21 Oct 1871) of James McFarland appointing his brothers Duncan and John McFarland as executors and giving all his 'goods and chattels, bills or bonds which might be due to him at his decease' to his sisters Jean and Margery McFarland.

²⁴ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: Release of Equity of Redemption, inst. 583 on 15 Nov 1871 by Duncan McFarland to Jean and Margery McFarland for 5 shillings.

mortgages – first from Baruch Tucker and then from John Calla.²⁵ Defaulting, a Power of Sale in 1883 allowed Tucker to assume ownership and he sold the property to Thomas Coulter for \$1750.²⁶

The Saunders Family

The English-born carpenter John Saunders (1828–96) first settled in Buffalo before moving to Canada in 1853 where he married and began his family. By 1861 the family were living in a single storey frame house with two acres of land outside Port Robinson. Presumably with the proceeds of the sale of the land, Saunders bought the prime 1/16-acre lot in 1868 and established himself initially as a grocer (as indicated on the 1871 census) and then baker. His eldest son William George took over the business: described as a baker and confectioner when he married Charlotte Fleming in 1879, the family lived adjacent to Stephen Beatty on Canby Street in 1881.

It is not clear why Saunders was unable to finance his debts but given that he borrowed an additional \$2000 within four years of having purchased the property, it must be assumed that it was he who was responsible for the extension of the north elevation for the (probable) summer kitchen and sidewinder staircase additions.

The family remained in Port Robinson and lived on Canby Street with his son. After his wife's sudden death in 1894, John Saunders returned to Buffalo to live with another of his sons and it was here he met a horrific death after being struck by a train two years later.²⁷

Thomas Coulter (1860–1940)

Thomas' Irish-born grandparents John Coulter (1790/95–66) and Hannah Mahon (1793–1882) first settled in Quebec before relocating to the Port Robinson area with their son Andrew (1821–92) before 1851. A contractor on the Welland Canal, he is said to have built the second house in Port Robinson.

His son Robert (1823–1908) joined the family around 1860 where he took up the trade of harness-maker and started his own family with Mary Malloy (1826–1904). He operated out of business premises north of Bridge Street between those of John Brown and Robert Elliot.²⁸

²⁵ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: B&S, inst. 584 on 1 Dec 1871 for \$1000; Mortgage, inst. 585 on 1 Dec 1871 by Saunders to Duncan McFarland for \$1000; Mortgage, inst. 813 on 10 March 1873 by Saunders to Baruch Tucker for \$400 at 8% over 2 years; Mortgage, inst. 1193 on 24 March 1875 by Saunders to John M. Calla for \$1600 at 8% over 3 years.

²⁶ LRO 59, Abstract Index A, Village of Port Robinson: Power of Sale, inst. 2471 on 11 Sept 1883 by Tucker to Thomas Coulter for \$1750.

²⁷ See *The Buffalo News*, 17 Jan 1896, p. 14; and *The Buffalo Commercial*, 16 Jan 1896, p. 10.

²⁸ See Second Welland Canal book 3, map 18.

Robert's eldest son Thomas (1860–1940) married Martha Minerva Willson (1862–1940), the granddaughter of 'Irish' John Willson and therefore also Duncan McFarland's niece. This family connection undoubtedly helped secure Coulter's success as a merchant and his position in Port Robinson society: indeed, he bought the McFarland House less than a year after he married Martha in January 1883 and only a few months after the birth of their first daughter Eva May.²⁹

The house at 18 River Street remained in the Coulter family for more than nine decades: after their deaths in 1940, the property was first inherited by Thomas and Martha's eldest daughter Eva Alguire. Less than a year later their youngest granddaughter Eva Goldspink inherited the property and here she lived with her husband Francis and family until 1992.³⁰

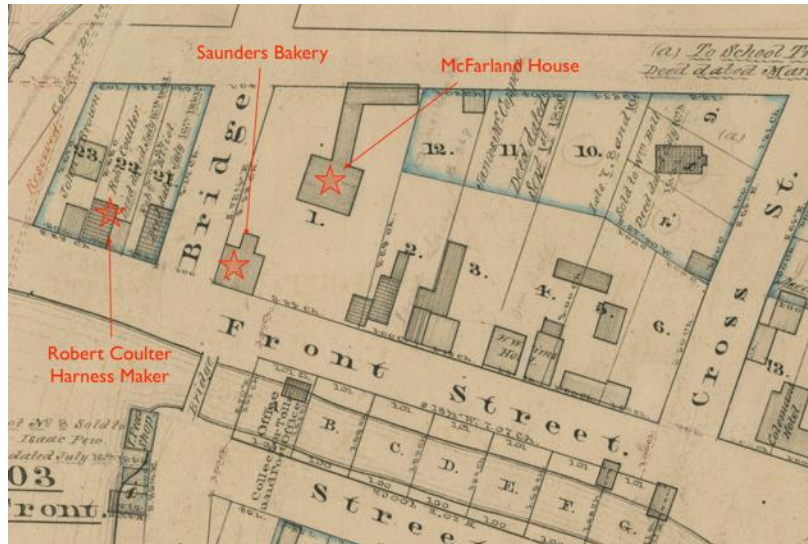
THE HOUSE

Early Welland Canal maps from c. 1860 show two structures on the one-acre lot: the first in the northwest corner being what would become Saunders Bakery and the second a main structure with a covered L-shaped extension (half-cloister/walkway?) extending along the southern half of the lot at South Street South. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Duncan McFarland rebuilt the house where his two sisters would live for slightly more than twenty years around 1860.³¹

²⁹ Martha was the daughter of Thomas Willson, while McFarland was the only son of Thomas' next younger sibling Margaret Willson. The Coulters and Willsons had a further point of contact through the original settlement at Beaverdams insofar as Robert's brother Andrew managed the 'stone hotel' at the ancient Indigenous crossroads that had been established by Ephraim Hopkins, after the latter's death in 1858. Two years later Coulter married Elizabeth Wilson, the sister of Hopkins' widow Mary (see King Head 2017, pp. 62–63).

³⁰ Thomas survived his wife by only four months. It was their eldest daughter Eva May Alguire who inherited the house but she herself died less than a year later, leaving the property to her youngest daughter Eva Martha Goldspink (1916–2006).

³¹ The current owners shared a map dated c. 1856 that is clearly a copy of map 18 from the Second Welland Canal Book 3 of c. 1860. The annotation indicates the St Catharines Museum from a study by Mayer, Phil and Associates. Notwithstanding the author of this report defers to the date given to this Second Welland Canal book as provided by Brock University Special Collections: that is, c. 1860,



Detail of Second Welland Canal Book 3, map 18, c. 1860 (BUSC)

There is evidence in the basement of charred foundations. Although it has not been possible to verify through the historical record a fire, there is sufficient anecdotal and oral history to support the claim that the current structure was built on or in close proximity to the original footings. An original construction date is not possible but it would have been between 1832 when McFarland bought the lot and c. 1860 when it first appears on maps. Land registry information allows us to reasonably assume that John Saunders financed an addition before 1875. His failure to repay the mortgages resulted in a Power of Sale by Baruch Tucker to Thomas Coulter in 1883.

As noted earlier the house is a good example of early Italianate domestic architecture but also harks back to the earlier Gothic Revival style with its set back kitchen wing – rather than adopting the compact block design. The prevalence of Italianate ornamentation on the exterior is entirely consistent with mid-nineteenth century date. It represents an evolution from the design of the earlier and much more ostentatious three-storey brick Elliot House (1852), located less than 500 metres to the southeast on South Street South.

More remarkable is that in a community of fewer than 1000 people there were as many as three brick houses within the immediate vicinity in 1861: McFarland's two-storey, the three-storey Elliot House and the two-storey house of the Stamford merchant Franklin Oldfield. Their houses broadcast their social prominence and economic wealth at a major hub of the Welland Canal.

Design

An earlier example of the Italianate style of house design, the house is reminiscent of the Gothic Revival style with its stepped back kitchen (featuring a secondary entrance on the façade and verandah). Italianate characteristics include the round-headed windows, rhythmic presentation of apertures and deep, heavily bracketed cornice that overhangs the second floor. The verandah roof most strongly evokes the Italianate villa style with its Ionic columns supporting a gently sloped roof adorned with dentilled cornice.

Exterior

The three-bay main façade is replicated on the second storey with symmetrically aligned windows. The main entrance at the northwest corner of the main block is set within a recessed casement architrave and is adorned by three-paned sidelights and eight-pane rectangular transom window. The ornamental keystone in the segmented arch is meant to reinforce the design's fidelity to the Italianate idiom. Notably the keystones above the two adjacent French doors on the main façade are more attenuated, extending beyond the segmented arches. Each of these adjacent main façade windows is further accented with a two sectioned, four-paned transom.

The four-over-four sash windows with green louvered shutters on the second storey are symmetrically placed but are slightly skewed to accommodate for the width of the main entrance and its flanking French windows. The sills rest on the gently sloped verandah roof.



West-facing façade of 18 River Street

The secondary entrance as part of the kitchen wing to the north similarly showcases an ornamental keystone set within the segmented brick arch,

although the transom is only six-paned and there is no added transom detail above the single window.

As in the main section four-over-four sash windows on the second storey (along adorned with green louvered shutters) are symmetrically arranged with their sills resting on the verandah roof; but only the window closest to the main block aligns directly over the secondary entrance, while that at the northwest corner of the house floats independently of the window below.

The profile of the verandah suggests that it originally terminated at the northern edge of the kitchen wing. Its set back extension at the northwest corner of the house supports the probability that what today is the laundry room was a later addition. This theory appears to be confirmed by reference to the arrangement of windows on the rear (east) elevation.



Northwest corner of house, beneath verandah

The rear elevation provides an insight into the evolution of the house, insofar as the block of irregularly placed apertures (windows and rear entrance from kitchen) terminates along the laundry room/sidewinder staircase section. There are two obvious shadows line: the first separates the main section of the house

from the setback kitchen wing. Herein are found the only flat headed apertures: what presumably was intended to be a Juliet balcony on the second storey and what had been an exit from what is now the main floor bathroom. Second, a brick meander (efflorescence?) extends from the bottom of the northeastern window to the roofline on the second storey. Decking and a short patio is attached to the rear kitchen door above the fieldstone foundation illustrate the grade change from the west to east.

Collars for the supporting iron rods that extend along the building's width are apparent at the base and ceiling limit of the second storey approximately at the centre of the house.



Rear (east facing) elevation

Like the rear (east) elevation, the south elevation reveals the fieldstone foundation beneath a shallow stone dado course. Although it is not possible to see the foundation along the north elevation, it is clear that the house was constructed on a grade depression from west to east.

The most character-defining feature is the three-sided bay window that extends beyond the main block and is supported by the exposed foundation. Four fixed, round-headed lancet windows face directly south while there are double, hinged round-headed windows on either side. Double doors lead from the living room into what is now an enclosed conservatory space. The gently sloped roof showcases a similar cornice to that round the house, although it is narrower and simpler in design.

Set into the main block of the southern elevation, French windows flank the bay window. Like those on the façade, a double-paned transom extends beyond the hinged mullions. Two four-over-four sash windows are located immediately above the bay window and the southeastern window on the second storey; although there is no corresponding window above the southwestern window.

Two basement windows are located beneath the French windows. As elsewhere the elliptical segmented window arches feature ornamental keystones.

The collars for the full-length iron supporting rods that traverse the upper storey are apparent on the southeast side.



South elevation

The north elevation as it appears today almost certainly was a later addition (perhaps built as a summer kitchen). Currently used as a laundry room, the large exit door has a three-paned transom and is flanked by a four-over-four sash window to the west. Access is provided by a cedar porch and deck. A secondary door on the eastern side of the room leads to a closet. Above the exit is a window on the second floor that illuminates the sidewinder staircase. The exposed fieldstone foundation is not exposed in this section of the house.

First Floor

Almost all the trims, casings and mouldings are original to 1875 and are characterized by their depth and simplicity of design. The floors have all been taken back to their original iteration. Replica 'cross-and-bible' doors are used throughout. There is a strong probability that these were supplied by the planing mill operated by George and J.W. McFarland based in Thorold village but operating throughout the township.³²

³² A note in the *Thorold Post* from October 1875 described how the McFarland brothers were 'erecting a house for Mr. Geo. Ross, Port Robinson ...' (8 October 1875, p. 4). They were the sons of Duncan McFarland's half-nephew John and George Keefer's youngest daughter Amelia, an accomplished draughtsperson and businesswoman who was widowed when her children were young.

Notable characteristics of the main floor are what has become an enclosed conservatory that has been created from a bay window along the southern exposure. Here, the south-facing block of four fixed round-headed windows are flanked by a double set of hinged similarly round-headed, treble-paned windows can be opened on either side. It is unclear when the area was enclosed.



Interior of bay window conservatory

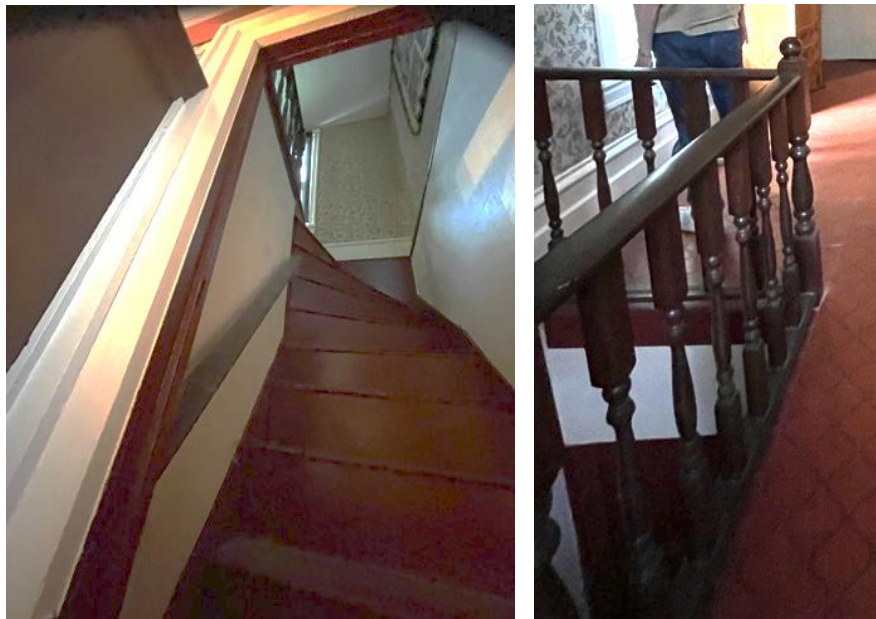
An early twentieth century light brass fixture remains in the dining room and is characterized by five suspended pressed-glass light hoods shaped as stars.

The central staircase is opposite the main entrance. It is characterized by a straight, simple ascent with even risers-treads and an unadorned handrail. The square newel post and balusters are so utilitarian as to possibly suggest an earlier construction were it not for the cyma-and-bead balustrade's elegantly circular return on the second-floor landing.



Central staircase (views from main floor and second-floor landing)

The tight quarter-turn, sidewinder staircase from the kitchen wing to the second floor was common among households that relied on servants. Its design is strongly reminiscent of that found at the Hagar-Swayze House on Seburn Road but is similar to Stephen Beatty's house on Canby Road. Notwithstanding its modern curved balustrade and lathed balusters indicate a later addition.



Sidewinder staircase from kitchen into servants' landing showing steep curvature and balustrade/baluster profiles

Second Floor

There were originally five bedrooms on the second storey.

In the main section were two interconnected rooms on the southern side. These rooms were separated from another room that is located on the northeastern side of the house. It is opposite a passage that provides closet storage and access to the loft, and is illuminated by a window above the main floor bay window.



View south through window directly above the bay window

A further two rooms are located on the southwest side of the kitchen wing section – one of which has been repurposed as a bathroom although these were probably both used as servants' quarters. It is probable access via the sidewinder quarter-turn staircase from the kitchen was a later addition – thus accounting for the expansive floor area in this, separate section.

Trims, baseboards, casings, mouldings and doors are – as below – largely original and in excellent condition. Notably the iron rods that anchor the breadth and width of the house are exposed, suggesting that the ceiling was raised.



Doors to main façade bedrooms with small closet and showing one of the supporting iron rods

Basement

Access was not provided at the time of the site inspection but it has been reliably reported that the charred foundation of the original structure is still apparent.³³

Roof

In accordance with the Italianate style, the box-shaped structure of the house has been surmounted with a low-peaked hipped roof. It features an ostentatiously deep cornice with heavily bracketed eaves. This profile is echoed in the roof above the bay window on the southern elevation.

While the grade of the roof above the verandah matches that of the main roof, the use of a flat frieze cornice supported by Ionic volutes atop fluted columns strictly adheres to the classical idiom.³⁴

³³ Cf. Site visit in June 2024 and personal communication with Tom Russell in July 2024.

³⁴ There is a strong similarity between the use of the Greek Ionic order and the façade's and southern elevation's window treatments to St Mark's Rectory in Niagara-on-the-Lake (see Stokes, pp. 28–29, 36–39).



Details of main roof and verandah roof at northwest corner; and above bay window

The set-back for the side kitchen addition maintains the roof's slope and from these two chimney stacks are located along the house's façade. As there is no evidence that fireplaces were located on the main floor, it can reasonably be assumed that the house was only ever heated by coal or wood-fuelled stoves which was circulated via pipes throughout the house.

Notably the roof of central block was originally designed with a belvedere that has since been converted to a central ridge.



Belvedere (obstructed by central chimney stack), n.d. [early 20C?] (courtesy of owners)

This feature is a positive link between this house and a trend for the Italianate 'villa-farm' style properties associated with Ontario industrialists around the Golden Horseshoe in southern Ontario in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. In addition to those of the Hamilton elite, examples of domestic structures built in Thorold Township include those of the contractor-engineer-entrepreneur John Brown on St David's Road (c. 1868–70) and that of Hugh Forbes Keefer on Front Street (1886).³⁵ Although the latter exhibited the most ostentatious and elaborate design, all three houses nonetheless sought to emphasize their owners' position in society, exploiting their vantage points overlooking the Welland Canal.

Windows

It is possible to be reasonably certain that all windows in the house are in their original position – with the exception of those along the rear (east) elevation. All have been updated to modern specifications according to heritage standards. Notable are the segmented arches over the round-headed windows ornamented with stone key stones. The French doors are still operational as are the sash windows on both the main and second floors. The upper storey windows on the main (east) façade have been adorned with green, louvered shutters.

Site Characteristics

There is a grade depression from west to east that accounts for the exposed foundation along the south and east elevations. The house built in c. 1860 was constructed on or near the foundation of an earlier dwelling that was destroyed by fire as evidenced in the charred structural elements observable in the basement.

Otherwise there are no notable topographic or site characteristics.

Outbuildings

There are no noteworthy outbuildings on the site.

Summary of Additions

The house envelope at 18 River Street appears to have been modified only once since it was rebuilt around 1860. At this time, the north elevation was extended to accommodate the sidewinder staircase from the kitchen to the second storey as well as what probably originally served as a summer kitchen. Other modifications include retrofits as well as heritage-grade restoration and rehabilitation of original features, including apertures and other structural features.

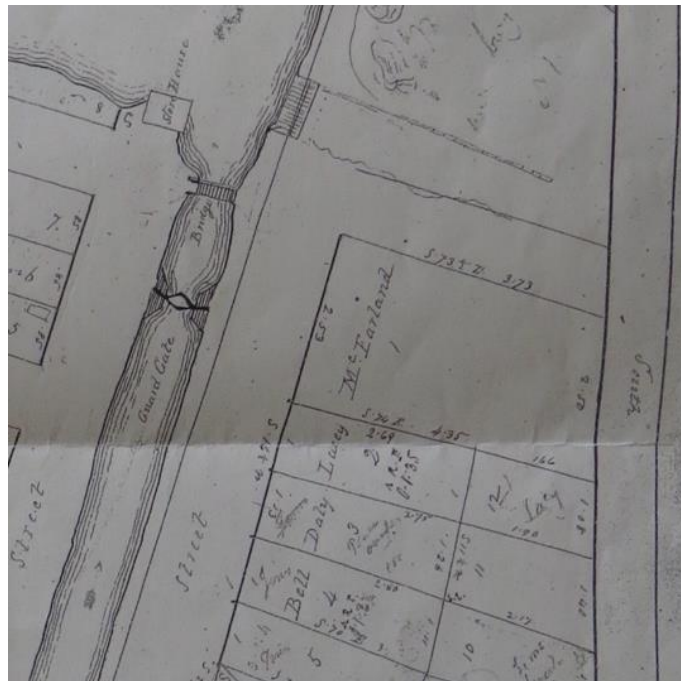
³⁵ Reid, 2000; King Head 2020. See also City of Hamilton, pp. 83, 101; and MacRae and Adamson, pp. 158–59.

COMMUNITY and CONTEXT

REVIEW OF HISTORIC MAPPING

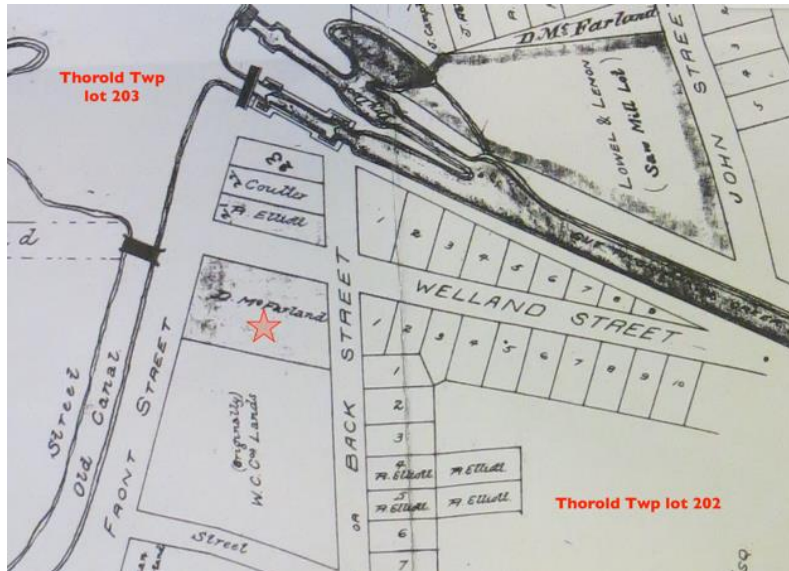
Historic maps of the area reveal little about the pattern of land ownership around the Subject Site but do demonstrate the way in which the community south of Bridge Street, west of Front Street and north of the Chippewa Creek (Welland River) had effectively become enclosed by the 1840s.

For instance, Baird and Killaly's *Survey of Lands Appropriated to the Use of the Welland Canal Company* identifies the location of the Guard Gate that controlled the flow of water from the feeder into the First Welland Canal.



Detail of Baird and Killaly's Survey of Lands, part 4, c. 1837 (BUSC)

McFarland's 1854 map shows the arrangement of the lots but does not provide information about built structures.



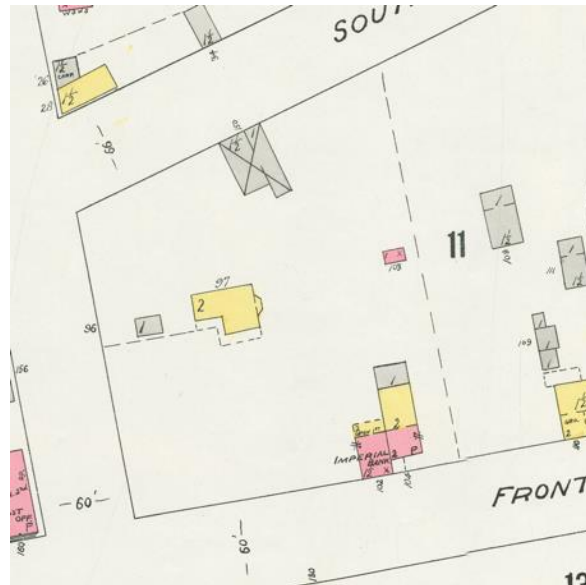
Detail of McFarland's Plan of Part of the Village of Port Robinson, Composed of Part of Lot No. 202 with the Broken Front, Township of Thorold, C.W. (1854; 1893)

The first indications of the built character of the community are found in the Second Welland Canal books of c. 1860. In particular, map 18 of the third book identifies the location of the (second) house at 18 Front Street as well as what had become Saunders Bakery at the northeast corner of Front and Bridge streets. The purpose of the L-shaped area extending from the house along South Street South is not obvious but it may have been a covered cloister/walkway.



Detail of Second Welland Canal book 3, map 18, c. 1860 (BUSC)

Notably by 1909, fire insurance plans show that the bakery structure was gone. Erroneously the McFarland house is identified as a frame structure. Since the rendering of the building envelope is accurate (including kitchen wing set-back and south facing bay window), there is no doubt that this is the house. It shows a stone driving shed to the west of the house.



PROXIMAL CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES

The history of the McFarland House reveals a considerable amount of information about land-use activities in the community of Port Robinson during its heyday as the principal lock juncture between Lake Erie and Ontario from 1829 until the 1880s.

The rerouting of the Third Welland Canal to the east in the 1870s and 80s brought an end to the prominence enjoyed by Port Robinson as an industrial and commercial centre. But it was dealt two blows that effectively ruined its chances for economic revitalization: first, a fire of 1888 destroyed the commercial centre and, a century later, the *SS Steelton's* collision with the Lift Bridge 12 in 1974 not only separated the east from the west communities but also brought an end to regional through-traffic along this route. Today, the Port Robinson East is accessible from Niagara Falls to the east along the Chippewa Creek Road and from the City of Thorold to north by Hwy 58 – or by the seasonal pedestrian and bicycle ferry.

Today, infilled Canal lands to the north and west have been zoned Open Space and Parks by the 2016 City of Thorold Official Plan.³⁶ Part of the Welland Canal Sub-watershed, the property is hemmed to the east and south by the Welland River's floodplain and valley shoreline buffer – both of which support natural heritage features, including wooded areas and provincially significant wetlands – thus providing a natural boundary around the community to the south and east of the village's original commercial thoroughfare on River Street.³⁷

As in many smaller mid-nineteenth century Upper Canadian communities, private and public buildings co-existed in close proximity. The relative grandeur of the house at 18 River Street is today surrounded by a group of other residential and commercial properties including the ostentatious Elliot House and the humbler O'Brien House – as well as by undeveloped and reclaimed Canal lands. More than 50 per cent of these properties were deemed in 1992 as being representative of 'either historically and/or architecturally significant material' or contributing 'to the streetscape and character of Port Robinson', while the remainder – then – were considered 'harmless and not disruptive'.³⁸ Nearly three decades later, it is still possible so say that most of the remaining building stock

³⁶ City of Thorold Official Plan, 2015, p. 238.

³⁷ City of Thorold Official Plan, 2015, pp. 242–43.

³⁸ Stokes, 1992b, p. 20.

harks from the 1850s to the end of the century, while only a few townhouses in the centre and northern periphery are modern.

The wealth of the community's heritage assets has long attracted attention. Concerted efforts since the 1980s, however, first gave serious consideration for seeking Heritage Conservation District designation under part V of the *OHA*.³⁹ Among the initiative's most committed supporters was the late Peter Stokes who reported on and frequently commented on Port Robinson's rich and historically significant building stock.⁴⁰ Continued support for preservation of the village's heritage and historic assets continue to this day, but were expressed succinctly in 1996 when it was identified as being the only Welland Canal community 'where one can experience the living heritage of ALL FOUR canals within "walking" distance'.⁴¹

Within a kilometre's radius of the McFarland House are the following properties that have all been designated under part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*:

1. Carl, Misener, Bald Cemetery (1798) at Carl Street/Towpath Road (by-law 13-2007)
2. Welland Canal, Second River Lock (c. 1850) (by-law 49-2006)
3. Robert Eliot House (1852) at 28 South Street South (by-law 945[86])
4. Camp House (1855) at 48 Canby Street (by-law 1027 [68])
5. The Pew House (c. 1860) at 18 South Street South (by-law 106–2021)
6. O'Brien House (c. 1870) at 38 South Street South (by-law 114-2010)
7. Port Robinson Brick School (1863) at Cross Street and South Street South (by-law 1251[80])
8. Ross House (c. 1870) at 80 Canby Street (by-law 945 [86])
9. Beckett's Reserve/Duncan McFarland House (c. 1840)/Stephen Beatty House (1879) at 10 Canby Street (by-law 128-2016)

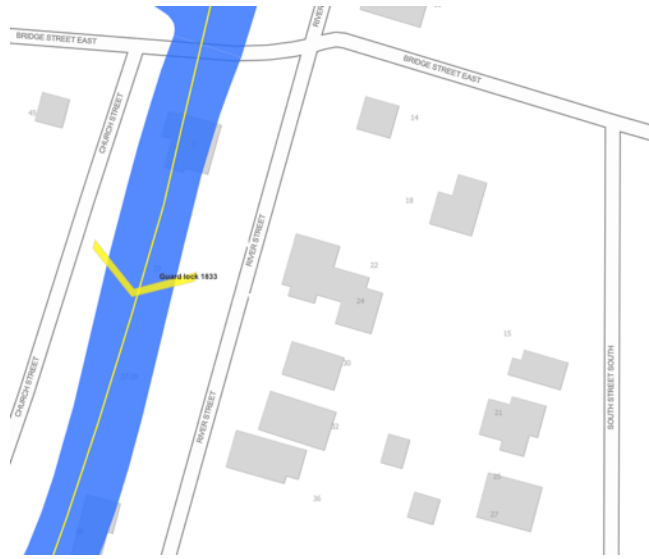
Heritage Thorold's 'Potential Heritage Directory' inventory includes another eight properties, including the Stark House (c. 1850) at 78 South Street North and St Paul's Anglican Church (1844) at 69 South Street North. Nor indeed is the guard lock that was erected in 1833 to control the water from the feeder into the First Canal identified.⁴² It is located almost immediately opposite the house but appears in no heritage inventories:

³⁹ See R. Shipley to A. DeLaat (LACAC), 4 January 1989; and Stokes, 1992b, pp. 20–22.

⁴⁰ See Stokes, 1986, 1991 and 1992a.

⁴¹ Salter, 1996, p. I. See Minns to City of Thorold, 10 September 1996 (Mayholme Foundation).

⁴² See Styran and Taylor 2001, pp. xxii–xxiii.



Location of the Second Welland Canal guard lock (1833), opposite 18 River Street (Beard 2024)

O.REG 9/06 EVALUATION
18 RIVER STREET, PORT ROBINSON

Consideration of the Subject Site at 18 River Street in Port Robinson also known as the McFarland House, c. 1860 as per O.Reg. 9/06 criteria to determine eligibility for designation under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (1990; 2024).⁴³

Criteria	Analysis
Architectural/Design Value	
1. The property has design or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method?	Yes, the McFarland House is an excellent example of an earlier Italianate villa style house that incorporates elements of the earlier Gothic Revival style in terms of layout and features like the verandah. It represents the evolution of brick house design in the small canal community of Port Robinson and can be compared with the nearby Robert Elliot House that was built a decade earlier and is more strongly representative of the Gothic Revival style.
2. The property has design or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit?	Yes, the house exhibits a high degree of craftsmanship through its use of materials and attempts to bridge two stylistic idioms. Many original fixtures (including doors and window treatments) and almost all original casings, mouldings, trims are present inside. The existence of the belvedere on the original structure further links this house to those of other prominent business leaders and industrialists in Thorold, including John Brown and Hugh Forbes Keefer.
3. The property has a design or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement?	No, while the house successfully conflates two domestic architectural styles, it does not demonstrate a particularly high degree of technical or scientific achievement relative to what is typical for the typologies
Historical/Associative Value	
4. The property has a historical or associative value because it has direct associations with	Yes, the house was built by the founder of Port Robinson, Col. Duncan McFarland on lands originally reserved for the First Welland Canal and the site of an earlier incarnation of the house that was destroyed by fire before 1860.

⁴³ Notably, in spite of its manifest heritage potential the property was not included in the inventory of potential heritage properties on the Heritage Thorold's register: <https://heritagethorold.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/THOROLD-HERITAGE-INDEX-Potential-Nov2016.pdf>

<p>a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community</p>	<p>McFarland’s association with the development of commerce and prosperity in Thorold Township is matched by his UEL family’s contributions elsewhere in the region, particularly in Niagara-on-the-Lake.</p> <p>The house has further associations with members of the family of Thomas and Martha Coulter who lived on site for more than 90 years, she also being a relative by marriage to McFarland and the prominent family of Irish John Willson UEL originally of Beaverdams.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Yes, even though not included on Thorold’s directory of potential (listed) heritage properties, designation of the house can provide important insights into the development of the community and further illustrate the relationship between early settler family units throughout the Niagara region.</p> <p>The structural feature of the belvedere makes a powerful allusion to the proprietorial attitude of prominent Welland Canal business leaders and industrialists who helped shape the heritage character of Thorold Township, including John Brown and Hugh Forbes Keefer.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Although it is not possible to identify the architect, designer or builder of the house, the McFarland House exhibits design characteristics that were common throughout the Township and region.</p> <p>It is probable that McFarland’s great-nephews George and J.W. McFarland provided the trims, casings, detailing from their planing mill in the village of Thorold (as they are known to have done for other properties in Port Robinson around this time).</p>
<p>Contextual Value</p>	
<p>7. The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.</p>	<p>Yes, the integrity of the 19th century community of East Port Robinson has remained largely intact due to a combination of physical isolation (Welland Canal, Chippewa Creek and railway) but also through its separation from the west community after 1974. As such the property helps define, maintain and support the heritage character of the area.</p>
<p>8. The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.</p>	<p>Yes, the structural envelope of the house and its set-back from River Street to the west and South Street South to the east ensures its footprint is consistent with a decision to remain secluded in a busy industrial and commercial corridor</p>

	while also – simultaneously – providing oversight through the creation of the belvedere viewing platform.
9. The property has contextual value because it is a landmark.	Yes, the house is an excellent example of the mid-19 th century transition from Gothic Revival to Italianate design aesthetics and house typologies and provides an important link to the homes of other prominent members of Port Robinson’s business elite.

SUMMARY

Based on the research and analysis summarized in this CHER, the Subject Property at 18 River Street in Port Robinson is found to meet seven or eight of the nine O.Reg. 9/06 criteria defined in the *OHA* (R.S.O. 1990; 2024). As such, it meets the minimum threshold of more than two criteria as required by regulatory changes to the *OHA* under Schedule 6 of the *More Homes Built Faster Act* (Bill 23) of 2022.

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

In c. 1860 Col Duncan McFarland built a second house on the east side of River Street just south of the intersection with Bridge Street and west of South Street South. Even though there is no concrete information about the first structure or its architect, the extant structure is a fine early example of Italianate villa style house design that retains fidelity to elements of the earlier Gothic Revival style of domestic architecture popular in Ontario since the middle of the nineteenth century. Although the house was not included in the register of potential heritage designations by Heritage Thorold (2017), it strongly exhibits heritage value in virtually all of the O.Reg. 9/06 categories required for designation under Part IV of the *OHA*. Among these, its strong design and aesthetic CHVI is matched by an exemplary pedigree through its association with the prominent UEL McFarland family which settled in the Niagara region in the late eighteenth century and the ‘father’ of Port Robinson, Col. Duncan McFarland.

HERITAGE VALUE

Located in the quiet, rural community of Port Robinson, west of the Fourth Welland Ship Canal, the McFarland House (c. 1860) is surrounded by nine other Part IV designated properties within a one-kilometre radius as well as by several other buildings exhibiting important CHVI.

The property on which Duncan McFarland built a first house before 1860 was purchased from Alexander McDonell in 1832, several years after he and his family moved from Allanburg to become the hamlet of Port Robinson’s first postmaster in 1829. Also serving as the First Welland Canal’s Collector of Customs McFarland extended his land ownership of the nascent community and began subdividing village lots that were registered in 1856.

The house is an exceptionally well-preserved example of early vernacular Italianate house design that incorporates characteristics of the earlier prevailing Gothic Revival style popular in domestic house design throughout southern Ontario in the mid to late nineteenth century. The latter is typified by the set-back kitchen wing on the north elevation and the verandah along the main (east) façade. Its Italianate characteristics include the box shape and low-pitched roof of the main block – on which a belvedere was originally situated. The heavily bracketed deep cornice of the roof exemplifies the Italianate style while the protruding bay window on the south elevation harkens back to the Gothic Revival style. The verandah and bay window roofs appear to be later additions and

allude to classical design with the dentilled cornices and the verandah's Ionic columns.

Most internal features are original including trims, casings, skirting boards, mouldings, etc. as well as layout and configuration. Doors and windows are largely original including functional French doors with storm windows. Modern modifications are minor and limited strictly to retrofit upgrades to the kitchen wing (and its later north addition) as well as the conversion of one of the servants' rooms into a bathroom and cloak room into main floor powder room. The main staircase is in its original location as is the later sidewinder staircase from the kitchen wing into the servants' second storey quarters.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Formal (aesthetic) elements contributing to the heritage value of the McFarland House, c. 1860:

- Early example of the emerging Italianate villa house typology with references to the Gothic Revival style and later Italianate additions intended to reinforce the idiom
- Expression of the owner's prominent sense of place in the community
- Position overlooking the route of the Second Welland Canal enhanced by construction of west-facing belvedere
- Excellent functional design, quality of materials and craftsmanship evident in
 - o Original location of apertures on west (façade), south and east elevations
 - o Proportional balance of width and length and pitch of roof to height
 - o Near original interior configuration of main floor and most of second-storey with almost all original mouldings, wall treatments, cupboards, hatches, casings, etc. throughout
 - o Unaltered later addition of sidewinder staircase and (probable) summer kitchen location along north elevation
 - o Verandah spanning width of the façade and encompassing set-back kitchen wing with rigorous fidelity to Ionic classical order ornamentation
- Site integrity through construction of second structure on footings of original structure that was destroyed by fire before 1860 and may have been built as early as 1832
- Formal, prominent brick construction would have resonated with other mid-nineteenth century brick dwellings in the immediate vicinity, including the three-storey brick Elliot House (1852) located within metres to the southwest on South Street South.

Associative heritage value:

- The role played by Col Duncan McFarland in the creation of the community at Port Robinson through the original village subdivision and sustained position within the community during its economic heyday.
- Subsequent ownership of the house connected to self-made immigrants whose fortunes were lost (Saunders) and made (Coulter) through entrepreneurial efforts within the commercial and industrial growth economy of Port Robinson in the mid- to late nineteenth century.
- Continued occupancy of the property for nearly a century by immediate and extended members of the Coulter family

Contextual heritage value:

- The proximity within less than one kilometre of nine *OHA* Part IV designated properties demonstrates the East Port Robinson community's commitment to heritage preservation of its mid-nineteenth century building stock that celebrates its historic commercial and shipbuilding prominence along the First and Second Welland Canals
- Position within re-naturalized post-industrial landscape associated with shipbuilding and dry dock activities including the *OHA* designated Second Welland Canal lock (c. 1850) located immediately to the north on River Street as well as the First Welland Canal guard lock (1833) that is located opposite the house on River Street south of Bridge Street West and east of Church Street.
- Probable archaeological potential associated with Indigenous land-use activities prior to the arrival of European settlers in the late eighteenth century as related to the area's location adjacent to the Welland River (Chippewa Creek) and various landforms.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The property at 18 River Street in Port Robinson (also known as the McFarland House, c. 1860) is located in a built-up residential area south and east of lands (now recreational and/or undeveloped infill) associated with the First and Second Welland Canals that gave rise to a community that emerged in the late 1820s when it was the original southern terminus. Expansion of the Canal in the 1840s along with the construction of the Welland Canal Railway cordoned off the residential area in which this house and other heritage properties remain.

Evidence that the first structure of possibly as early as 1832 was destroyed by fire is found in the charred remains of the foundation seen in the basement. Although there is no documentary information to confirm when the first building was constructed or when it was destroyed, land registry information suggests the latter may have been in the late 1850s. Welland Canal maps and the reference to the McFarland family living in a house of the same specifications in 1861 census make it reasonable to propose that a new house had been rebuilt by c. 1860.

The house was located opposite the First Canal's feeder guard lock (1833) that soon became part of the Second Canal when it the route was built directly from Port Colborne (rather than along its original course of the Chippewa Creek (Welland River) from Lake Erie via the Niagara River). Like his industrialist contemporaries elsewhere around the shore of Lake Ontario, McFarland built a belvedere atop his Italianate villa style house from which he – as later would John Brown and Hugh Forbes Keefer in the village of Thorold – was able to command a view of shipping activities along the Second Welland Canal.

With the opening of the Third Welland Canal in the 1880s bypassing the village, Port Robinson's prominent canal community status waned. The community was further isolated when the 1974 SS *Steelton* destroyed No. 12 lift bridge over the Canal separating the West and East Port Robinson communities. Notwithstanding, the East village has managed to preserve a timeless, quaint quality with many extant examples of heritage building stock.

The author of this CHER report would like to propose the following recommendations:

1. That the Duncan McFarland House (c. 1860) at 18 River Street in Port Robinson be designated under part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in all three categories of heritage value: Aesthetic, Associative and Contextual. It possesses great heritage significance through the enterprising activities of Col. Duncan McFarland who established the community at Port

Robinson and as such the history of the Welland Canal and the development of the Canadian Great Lakes and Canadian economies.

2. That the house at 10 Canby Street in Port Robinson that was designated as Beckett's Reserve/Duncan McFarland House (c. 1840)/Stephen Beatty House (1879) under by-law 128-2016 be renamed the 'Stephen Beatty House (1879)' in order to avoid confusion with identification of a second house built by Duncan McFarland.

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The report's author, Sarah King Head, has been a professional member of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals (CAHP) since 2019, with the specialization of Historian.

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Recent contributions to heritage documentation and conservation include participation in various initiatives including the restoration of historic Beaverdams Church (since 2011), and the Landscape of Nations 360° Indigenous Education Initiative (2018–22). She is also a board member of various local, provincial and national organizations including the Thorold Museum (since 2018), OAHP (since 2020) and CAHP (since 2020).