

## 6.0 Historic Buildings

### 6.1 General

Oakville was a late starter compared to other communities dotting the Lake Ontario shoreline. Many of these had been seeing intensive settlement for over half a century before Oakville started in the 1830's. During this interval popular taste had undergone extensive evolution and as a result building styles which were, and in fact still are, quite evident in older lake towns such as Kingston and Niagara-on-the-Lake, are completely lacking in Oakville.

The Georgian style of building had been popular during the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was characterized by symmetry, formality and simplicity. In British North America, the most common feature of this style was the centre-hall house plan with one or two window openings, equally spaced on either side of a simple entrance. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the popularity of this style was waning and with the widespread destruction wrought during the War of 1812, the existing Georgian building stock of Upper Canada was virtually wiped out.

The buildings which replaced them were of a new style. The influence of the light Adamesque style introduced in Britain by the Scottish brothers Robert and James Adam during the late eighteenth century coupled with the influence of a similar movement in the United States termed the Federal style, resulted in the Neo-Classical movement being the major style employed in post-war rebuilding. Southern Ontario lake towns abound with grand houses of the Neo-Classic style but it was a full fifteen years from the close of the war before anything of significance was to happen in Oakville. By this time, cultural evolution combined with a growing political reform movement had resulted in the dominance of the mature Classical Revival style of Republican origins.

### 6.2. Development of Architectural Styles

Oakville, being not appreciably different from most other British colonial towns, was largely concerned with wresting itself from the grip of the wilderness and shipping out wheat. The grand cultural and artistic schemes of Europe had to wait their turn on

the list of priorities. This is not to say that the early residents of Oakville were not concerned with contemporary fashion. However, cultural theories conceived in London were filtered by the Atlantic, passed through New York, Albany, Kingston and York and then handed to often uneducated craftsmen on the fringe of the wilderness for interpretation. This interpretation has been dubbed the vernacular and it abounds in Oakville.

While not educated in the high styles, the builders and craftsmen of the colonies had an artistic sense which rendered their works not only functional but pleasing and sophisticated as well. The early buildings of Oakville generally reflect the Classical Revival or Gothic styles or often a combination of the two.

In most of the residential structures, stylistic concerns are restricted to detail and trim. For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the centre-hall Georgian plan remained popular. This was due in part to its ease of construction and climatic suitability. In Old Oakville, this basic form has been embellished with door and window surrounds, cornice treatments and window openings of a design to evoke the preferred style. The degree of decorative detail was a result of the financial capabilities of the owner with contrasts varying from street to street.

The Italianate, or Tuscan style became popular during the 1850's and 60's and has substantial representation in Oakville. The round headed window is a trademark of this style.

The Gothic and Italianate styles, with their emphasis on the picturesque were not well suited to the symmetrical Georgian houseform. With the introduction of the wood stove to replace the open fireplace, it became easier to heat a house and the Georgian plan was gradually replaced by the "L" shaped, asymmetrical house plan, characteristic of the Gothic and Italianate style.

The earliest buildings in Oakville were constructed quickly with the easiest and most available materials. Timber was there for the taking and shipwrights and carpenters employed in the construction of the piers and the shipyards were skilled in its handling.

While minimum standards were imposed as a condition of settlement, most of the first buildings were modest in size with a view to future enlargement or replacement.

This improvement was not long in coming for a Hamilton newspaper of 1834 reported that shanties and log cabins were being replaced by "a number of houses (some very good ones, two stories high) all occupied..."<sup>1</sup> The fact that many of these buildings have survived to this day is evidence of the skill of their builders.

Several sawmills were established at an early date and carpenters had ample access to trim and mouldings of every kind, as well as cut lumber and timber. Stone from the creek was a suitable building material but did not lend itself to easy manipulation and was therefore generally restricted to foundations and basements. In the earliest times brick was not readily available and therefore expensive. As the Town prospered though, it became desirable to have a house built of this substantial and prestigious material and many homes which were originally frame construction were given a brick veneer.

The nineteenth century buildings of the residential areas have been less altered than those along Lakeshore Road and where alteration has taken place it has often been done with a fair sensitivity to the existing architecture. This has been the result of several influences. The residential areas have come under less development pressure than the commercial district and therefore changes have been less drastic and occurred more slowly. Secondly, a residential district is where people live and this generally results in a greater concern for the aesthetic aspects of the neighbourhood.

When changes have been made, they have been given real thought and the alterations may in fact, enhance all other aspects rather than detract from them as thoughtless changes inevitably do. Thirdly, this area has generally been one of higher than average income in which residents have been able to afford the luxury of contemplation and sensitive change.

The existing nineteenth century building stock in the Old Oakville district is in very good condition. Regular maintenance and repair has reduced the need for major renovations and few other Ontario towns display the large numbers of well maintained nineteenth century buildings as can be seen in Oakville. The extensive variety in both age and style of buildings is complimented by the close mingling of both the workers cottage and the merchant's townhouse. A wide range of building techniques is displayed, and the history of growth and changes in individual buildings and the Town as a whole is told by the existing built environment.

<sup>1</sup>Western Mercury, Hamilton, August 18, 1834, quoted in Hazel Mathews, Oakville and the Sixteen.

### 6.3. Historic Building Inventory

The following is an Historic Building Inventory. For each building there is a photograph, building address and a brief description. The photograph sequence follows the order and boundary of the blocks as used in part 6, Block Analysis. Figure No. 8 shows the location of each building in question.

The following blocks contain the noted photograph sequence:

| <u>Block Number</u> | <u>Photograph Sequence</u> |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1                   | 1 - 2                      |
| 2                   | 3                          |
| 3                   | 4 - 6                      |
| 4                   | -----                      |
| 5                   | 7 - 14                     |
| 6                   | 15 - 17                    |
| 7                   | 18 - 27                    |
| 8                   | 28 - 33                    |
| 9                   | 34                         |
| 10                  | 35 - 40                    |
| 11                  | 41 - 50                    |
| 12                  | 51 - 53                    |
| 13                  | 54 - 57                    |
| 14                  | 58 - 60                    |
| 15                  | 61 - 67                    |
| 16                  | 77                         |
| 17                  | 68 - 70                    |
| 18                  | 74 - 76                    |