

1480 Highway 7A, Bethany (Old Bethany Post Office)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Bethany

PLAN 5 PT LOT 3

PIN 632660326

September 2021



Kawartha Lakes



Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The subject property has been researched and evaluated in order to determine its cultural heritage significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990. A property is eligible for designation if it has physical, historical, associative or contextual value and meets any one of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. An evaluation of the property has determined that 1480 Highway 7A has cultural heritage value or interest and merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:

i. is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method:

The subject property is a representative example of a vernacular nineteenth century commercial property with a false façade. This was the predominant building style in Bethany for commercial buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century and it one of only a few remaining after the 1911 fire which destroyed a significant portion of the downtown.

ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit:

The property displays a high degree of craftsmanship in the ornate columns and spindle work on its front porch.

iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement:

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

2. The property has historical or associative value because it:

i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to the community:

The subject property has direct associations with several themes and figures that are significant to the community. The building has direct associations with the railway in Bethany which was a major driving economic factor in the community in the second half of the nineteenth century as this building was originally used as a grain office for the Midland Railway. It also has association with the postal system in the community through its role as an historic post office. It also has direct associations with local MPP Josiah Johnston Preston who used it as his local office beginning in 1911.

ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture:

The property yields information regarding both the history of the railway in Bethany in its role as the former Midland Railway grain office and

information regarding the postal system in the community in its role as the historic Bethany Post Office.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:

The designer and builder of the property is not known.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area:

The subject property is important in maintaining the historic character of Bethany's historic core and main street. As one of the few buildings in the community which survived the 1911 fire that destroyed much of the downtown, the old post office maintains the village's mid-nineteenth century origins as a rare surviving example from this period.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:

The property is historically and functionally linked to its surrounding as a non-residential property in Bethany's downtown core. The property forms part of the main street landscape, now Highway 7A, and is linked to its surroundings through shared historical use.

iii. is a landmark.

The property is a well-known local landmark as one of the oldest buildings in the village and as the former post office.

Design and Physical Value

1480 Highway 7A has design and physical value as a representative example of a false façade commercial buildings in Kawartha Lakes. It is only one of a few of these types of structures remaining in the municipality from the second half of the nineteenth century and retains its original form and massing. It also demonstrates a high degree of craftsmanship in its porch, a later addition, which incorporates detailed woodwork into its overall design.

The building itself is simple in its massing, construction and layout. It consists of a small, gable front structure, with a one room interior. Images from the early twentieth century show that the form of the main portion of the building has not changed from this time, although there have been some modifications. The front includes large picture window and offset entrance, with a single window on each of the two side elevations and a door on the rear elevation. The exterior of the building is characterized primarily by its false façade and its ornate verandah.

The false façade is a defining feature of this structure. False façades were often used in rural commercial buildings throughout the nineteenth century. Often known as “boomtown facades” for their association with western American boomtowns in the late nineteenth century, they were much more common than this name may suggest. What is likely Canada’s largest collection of these buildings is in Dawson, Yukon where many false fronted buildings constructed during the 1890s gold rush are still extant and have been restored to a high standard. However, other examples of these structures can be found in a wide array of Canadian communities, many of which are survivors from the early days of settlement before the replacement of these wooden structures with more substantial, larger ones of brick.

Most of these structures were constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century when the Italianate style was the popular choice for commercial architecture. The Italianate style was generally constructed in brick, with large two or three story commercial structures with the store front on the main level. They incorporated a flat roof, with several bays, an ornate façade and cornice line. They were also usually constructed from brick and required considerable resources on the part of the owner.

The false façade provided an alternative for property and business owners who did not have the means or the permanence to erect a brick building but wanted to project an image consistent with the popular commercial architectural style of the day. The ability to attach a false façade constructed in wood onto a gable front wooden building made a rural commercial store look more in tune with current trends, aligned it with the architectural design of urban centres and gave a structure the perception of larger massing. In some communities, the consistent use of these types of buildings even began

to mimic the continuous streetwall found in more urban communities where the Italianate style was widely employed. Construction in wood also allowed for decorative elements, such as cornices, to be added at a relatively low cost. These buildings were intended to project stability and success, even when the resources were not there to build brick buildings. In general, money was spent on the façade of the building and the structure itself remained purely utilitarian. False facades also had the advantage that they could be added after a building was already constructed, allowing for an evolutionary process from the basic gable front structure as time and resources allowed. In western communities that developed quickly in the second half of the nineteenth century, the so-called “boomtowns”, this style provided a quick and easy route to architectural style in communities that were growing at a rapid rate, and could deflate as quickly making a large and early investment in a brick building impractical. In other communities, such as those in Ontario, they were a more budget and material friendly option, particularly for smaller communities.

There are several similar examples regionally. One notable example is the post office in Roseneath in Northumberland County which was constructed around the same time as the Bethany building and is a one-and-a-half storey gable building hidden behind a two-storey façade. There are also three small commercial properties of this type in Cobocook on the north side of Highway 35, of which at least two appear to be historic, when compared to older photographs of the community. Further afield, several interesting examples survive in the community of Schomberg which retains a number of examples of various sizes on its main street. Other rural communities also retain some of their false façade commercial buildings, but they are not as common as the much more ubiquitous brick Italianate structures found in many Ontario communities.

In Bethany itself, there are three examples of this type of building: the old post office, the Bethany General Store (1473 Highway 7A), and Williams Design Studio (1470 Highway 7A). The general store is the oldest of these three buildings having been constructed in 1859. Williams Design Studio is the newest, as it was constructed as a replacement for an older commercial building on this location after the 1911 fire and replicated the popular construction style from the nineteenth century.

These types of commercial properties are not common in Kawartha Lakes as a whole primarily because of their construction material and the tendency for wooden commercial buildings to succumb to fire. Historic photos of Bethany from before the 1911 fire show a number of other properties built in this manner, which were likely destroyed as part of the fire. They were also more readily demolished to make way for larger Italianate-style brick buildings in the nineteenth century, or modern commercial buildings in the twentieth century. Similarly, and unlike in many western communities where the buildings were

more ubiquitous, the slower pace of growth and development made the false façade a less popular alternative, as businesses were often in the same location for a much longer time and could invest more heavily in their buildings. The subject property, therefore, represents both an important and relatively uncommon style in the municipality.

The building also demonstrates a high level of craftsmanship in its front porch. This porch is believed to have been added around 1938, shortly after the building was converted into the post office. The porch was added in order to shelter the mail baggage after it was unloaded from the train. Mail arrived twice daily and brought to the post office across the road from the COPr station. Earlier photos show the building close to the road with no porch or awning over the entrance. However, the porch has now become a key defining feature on the structure.

Although the porch is a later addition, it is decidedly Victorian in its style and elements. The type of ornament present on this building became increasingly popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the advent of machine lathe-turned spindle work that was accessible to a wide range of consumers. It is most commonly associated with the Queen Anne style which was at its most popular in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and integrated large amount of exterior ornamentation, including ornate porches such as this one.

By 1938, the Queen Anne style had largely fallen out of fashion, declining around the First World War, making it a less popular choice for the time. Nevertheless, this porch is an excellent example of a porch in that style and includes key elements found in many Queen Anne style porches. These include: the turned columns with decorative brackets; the rounded brackets with radiating spindles; the band of spindle work; and sawn detailing. The choice to add a porch in this style in the 1930s is not known but it has become a well known feature of the building and one that demonstrates the detailed craftsmanship of the style.

The interior, which consists of a single rectangular room, also holds architectural significance as it retains many of its original features, including those used during its time as a post office. Most notably, this includes the bank of post boxes which currently runs through the centre of the room. They originally were located along the wall, but have since been relocated. This is an original feature from the 1930s and is an important design element from this period of the building's existence. The interior also includes original features such as the vertical board walls and board ceilings. These features recall the buildings early years as both an office and a post office.

Historical and Associative Value

1480 Highway 7A has historical and associative value in its connection with several local theme and figures. Notably, it has a direct historical link to the arrival of the railway in Bethany and the local postal service due to its uses as both a railway company office and a post office. It also has historical links to local MPP Josiah Preston who used the building as an office in the early twentieth century.

The building was originally constructed as a grain office for the Midland Railway in 1875 across the road from its current location on the north side of what is now Highway 7A. The Midland Railway, then known as the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton (PHL&B) Railway, had arrived in Bethany in 1856. The construction of the railway was part of a massive boom in regional railway construction across Canada in the mid-1850s. The company had formed in 1854 in Port Hope to provide a new transport link into central Ontario and to compete with its rival the Cobourg and Peterborough which had been completed that same year. Lindsay was chosen as the first terminus due to its connection to the new Trent-Severn Waterway and access to further, more northerly markets. Construction began in Port Hope, through Millbrook, Bethany and Omemee before reaching Lindsay in 1857. The railway was renamed the Midland Railway in 1869 with its expansion westwards, eventually reaching its final terminus of Midland on Georgian Bay in 1878. The Midland system was eventually absorbed by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1893 and, in 1923, the Canadian National Railway.

The arrival of the railway in Bethany was the impetus for the growth of the community. While the area had been settled since the early nineteenth century, it was mostly scattered farms with smaller hamlets throughout. The new station allowed for Bethany to grow into a much more sizable community with increased access to trade, transport in and out of the community, and post. By 1869, the population of the village had grown to 300 inhabitants and boasted a range of stores and services as well as several hotels and three churches. Through the proximity to the railway, the village became a local hub for the surrounding rural community.

This growth as the result of the arrival of the railway was an extremely common demographic trend, particularly in small communities across Canada. The railway allowed for new and increased economic opportunities as well as better access to new residents to reach communities. The use of the railway as a mechanism for shipping out agricultural products brought new wealth to an area and in turn attracted new businesses and services to railway communities. Increased domestic markets in growing urban centred fueled the demand for rural agricultural produce providing a ready and growing market. This was particularly the case for domestic wheat and grain which were in high demand

in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, corresponding with the boom in railway construction.

The subject property was constructed by the Midland Railway as their local office and its construction is directly related to the arrival and growth of the railway in the community. By the mid-1870s, the railway was well established in Bethany and was an important feature of the local community. In particular, it allowed for easier access to growing southern markets for agricultural products, specifically for grain which was the largest export from the region. This small office was involved in the logistical planning for the transport of local products, specifically grain, on the Midland line, a vital part of the economy of both Bethany and the surrounding township and directly related to wider economic trends related to the shipment of grain on the railway occurring at this time. It was also one of the buildings impacted when the new Canadian Pacific Railway line arrived in 1911 and was moved across the road to facilitate the construction of the new line and station.

The arrival of the CPR corresponded with the great fire of 1911. This fire, which was of unknown origin, destroyed most of Bethany's business section on the south side of the main street. This did not include the Midland Railway office which survived the fire; it is not known if it had yet been relocated. It is one of only a few remaining nineteenth century commercial properties which survived the fire and remains standing.

The property also has historical associations with Josiah Johnston Preston, the local Conservation MPP for Durham East between 1902 and 1919. Preston was born in Manvers Township in 1855 to James Preston, a farmer and grist miller, and his wife Jane Johnston. The elder Preston has built a grist mill to the west of Bethany in the early 1800s. Educated locally, Preston began his career as a grain merchant before moving into local politics. Between 1888 and 1897, he served as both reeve and deputy reeve of Manvers Township and as a Durham County councillor representing the Bethany area. In 1897, he was elected as the warden of the United Counties of Northumberland and Durham before returning to Manvers the following year as the township clerk. In 1902, he entered provincial politics, winning the seat of Durham East for the Conservative Party. He held the seat until 1919 when he was defeated by the populist United Farmers of Ontario party.

Preston was well known locally as a long-standing figure in local and provincial politics. He was a member of the Church of England and the Loyal Orange Order and was also a freemason who actively participated in local events and fundraisers. He was particularly active in the congregation of St. Mary's Church in Lifford where he secured the endowment of the cemetery and served as the treasurer of the cemetery board from 1928 until his death in 1937. His various

political and charitable activities can be followed in the local newspapers of the time, particularly the Millbrook Reporter.

In 1911, when the building was moved to make way for the new CPR line, Preston took over the property from the Midland Railway and used it as his local office. In fact, it is believed that Preston and his brother Sidney used the office prior to its move in their role as local grain merchants working with the railway and it is possible that they originally oversaw its construction. It is likely that the building was deemed surplus to operations with the arrival of the CPR and the major building working ongoing in the area. When it was moved, it was located at the front of the lot on which it currently stands and would have been an ideal location for a local MPP's on the main street of the community. Historical photos of the village in the early twentieth century show its location and proximity to the new CPR tracks. They also show its material condition before the addition of the porch, which was added to the building when it became a post office in 1938.

In that year, the building was purchased by James McKinnon who moved the post office into it. There had been a post office in Bethany since 1859 when a building was constructed across from the PHL&B station and was operated by Frank Blakely in it. The post office was intimately associated with the railway which, by the second half of the century, took on a vital role in the distribution of mail throughout the province. By 1938, the original building had become too small for the community so it was moved into the former Midland and Preston office. It served in this capacity until 1983, with a series of postmasters who operated it. The verandah was added during its early years as a post office.

In most rural communities, as in Bethany, the post office was a vital community institution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It provided the community with a space to receive news and goods from the outside world, to meet others within the community, and to access other government services. This role was highly significant to the community throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century and makes the building an important community hub historically.

The postal system in Canada, and particularly in Bethany, was intimately linked to the development of the railway. While postal service in Canada had existed long before the railway, this new form of transport was revolutionary for the delivery of mail which had previously relied on non-mechanized forms of transport. The railway made mail delivery faster and more reliable for the many new communities across Canada where new residents were moving and needed modes of communication.

The transport of bulk mail by rail first began in Canada in the 1830s, although Canada's formal use of trains as part of the mail system came in the mid-1850s,

corresponding with the boom in railway constructed occurring in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Specific trains were commissioned to transport mail and sort it on board, to increase efficiency within the system. By the early 1860s, trains across Canada were required to carry mail by the government after the passage of the Railway Postal Service Act of 1863. The railway continued to be vital to mail delivery until Canada Post official switched from rail to truck service for bulk delivery in 1987, although the transition had already begun by the 1970s.

The development of a post office in Bethany was directly linked to the arrival of the railway in 1859 and the post office continued to be located in close proximity to the train station, first the original Midland Station and then the CPR station. This allowed the mail to easily be picked up by the postmaster and returned to the post office for sorting and delivery. Bethany's position as the railway community also meant that it was centrally located for mail distribution and delivery, making it an important communication hub for the wider area. Mail was vital for communication and business, particularly in rural communities where it was the primary means of communication to the outside world until into the twentieth century. In Bethany, the mail arrived twice daily and included letter mail, as well as larger parcels.

The postal service was also critical for rural communities to obtain in personal and household goods. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, rural Canadians shopped by mail for wide arrays of goods, from clothing to farm implements. While certain goods were bought locally, the postal service allowed rural Canadians access to goods which was not otherwise available outside of urban centres. Estimates from the early twentieth century place the ratio of parcels to letter mail coming into rural communities at ten to one. Eatons and Simpsons catalogues, as well as those from other mail order companies, were ubiquitous in small-town households and the post office was where these goods were shipped to and picked up by local families. The post office, therefore, including the one in Bethany, was a critical location for local families and their day-to-day lives as the space where these parcels were distributed.

Bethany also served as a local hub for rural and local mail delivery because of its proximity to the train station. Rural delivery served the Bethany area as well as outlying communities with their own smaller post offices where the mail would be unloaded from the train in Bethany and transported out to outlying communities and to rural areas. The building was, in fact, moved to accommodate rural mail delivery, through the addition of a driveway on the western side of the building where a truck could pull up and park in order to load. In this way, the building, in its role as a post office, was also a key structure in the wider rural community in Manvers Township as well as in the village.

The post office was central to community life, both for the services it provided and as a local hub. Emma Lamb, who served as postmaster along with her husband Ernie from 1960-1980, recalled how important the post office was for the village for residents to come and visit and catch up on local news, sometimes more than once a day, stating that “the post office of that time was the centre of village life.” The postmaster was responsible for a large number of functions within the village, including the mail, the sale of stamps, money exchanges and orders, and government forms which were available at the post office for pick up.

In 1983, Canada Post built a new post office on the site of the original 1859 post office. Service was later privatized. The subject property was purchased in 1983 by the Manvers Historical Society which moved it back from the road to its current location. It now serves as the Society’s headquarters and reading room.

Contextual Value

1480 Highway 7A has contextual value as part of the historic main street of the village of Bethany. The property is important in maintaining the historic character of the village and, as one of the few buildings in the community which survived the 1911 fire that destroyed much of the downtown, the old post office maintains the village’s mid-nineteenth century origins as a rare surviving example from this period. It is historically linked to other commercial properties in the commercial core and is also a local landmark.

The commercial core of Bethany along Highway 7A is comprised of a number of historic buildings both pre- and post-dating the 1911 fire. This include residential properties, institutional properties, such as the former Manvers Township hall, and commercial properties including the general store and post office. Taken together, these properties form a cohesive historic streetscape that provides a distinct historical character to Bethany. This includes the old post office which retains its historic massing and features.

The property to which the post office had the strongest contextual connection, the CPR train station, has long been demolished. However, the building is also historically linked to other commercial properties in downtown Bethany through shared historic use. This shared use characterizes the commercial core of the community and differentiates it from the surrounding residential properties. It marks the area as the local commercial hub for the rural community in this area of Manvers Township around Bethany through the cluster of properties along Highway 7A which is differentiated from the agricultural landscape around the community.

The building is not in its original location. The post office was originally located on the north side of Highway 7A but was relocated in the early twentieth

century to make way for the railway and was placed at the front of the current lot, close to the street. The building was then moved back from the road in the late 1980s by the current owner, the Manvers Township Historical Society. Nevertheless, the building still retains its contextual value as part of Bethany's downtown.

The property is a well-known local landmark, as the old Bethany Post Office, and is recognized outside of the community as a building of significance as well. Despite the building's earlier life as an office, it is most well-known as a post office, likely because it continued in that use until the 1980s. It is consistently recognized as the oldest surviving and restored free standing post office in Ontario, although it was not constructed as a post office originally. It has appeared in various publications, both online and in print, most notably in the 1969 book, *Rural Ontario*, which documents many historic structures across rural and small town Ontario. The property is also the site of current community events in Bethany hosted by the Manvers Township Historical Society, including meetings, plant sales and bake sales. It is an important, well-known and valued building in the local community.

Summary of Reasons for Designation

The short statement of reasons for designation and the description of the heritage attributes of the property, along with all other components of the Heritage Designation Brief, constitute the Reasons for Designation required under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

Design and Physical Value

1480 Highway 7A has design and physical value as a late nineteenth century vernacular building and the former post office in Bethany. Constructed in 1875, the building has architectural value as a representative and rare example of a surviving false façade vernacular commercial structure in Kawartha Lakes. The building is one of three false façade buildings in Bethany and one of only a few commercial buildings in the village to have survived the 1911 fire which destroyed much of the community's commercial core. The false façade covers a one storey gable front building. The property also shows a high degree of craftsmanship in its Queen Anne-style front porch, a later addition, which includes turned columns and ornate spindlework.

Historical and Associative Value

1480 Highway 7A has historical and associative value in its former roles as both a grain office for the Midland Railway and as the former Bethany Post office. The building was first constructed as a grain office for the railway, which was a key economic driver in mid-nineteenth century Bethany and the subject property yields information about the role of the railway in the growth of the community. It was converted into a post office in 1938 and, in that role, was an important community and communications hub for Bethany and the surrounding rural area. In its role as the post office, it yields information regarding the history of communications in the community.

Contextual Value

1480 Highway 7A has contextual value as part of the historic commercial core of downtown Bethany. The property helps maintain the small town commercial character of this area of Highway 7A and helps to differentiate the main street of the community from the surrounding residential areas of the village and the rural agricultural landscape of Manvers Township. It is historically linked to other historic commercial properties on the main street through its usage. It is also a well-known local landmark which is recognized both in the community and outside of it.

Summary of Heritage Attributes to be Designated

The Reasons for Designation include the following heritage attributes and apply to all elevations, unless otherwise specified, and the roof including: all façades, entrances, windows, chimneys, and trim, together with construction

materials of wood, brick, stone, stucco, concrete, plaster parging, metal, glazing, their related building techniques and landscape features.

Design and Physical Value

- One and a half storey construction
- Gable roof
- Fenestration including:
 - Picture window
- Offset entrance
- False façade
- Front porch including:
 - Turned columns
 - Spindlework
 - Brackets
 - Cut woodwork
- Interior wall and ceiling cladding

Historical and Associative Value

- Former use as grain office and post office
- Association with the Midland Railway and railway history of Bethany
- Association with MPP Josiah Preston
- Mailboxes

Contextual Value

- Relationship to the surrounding historic commercial core of Bethany
- Status as a local landmark
- Views to and from the property along Highway 7A and Ski Hill Road

Images



Front elevation



West elevation



East elevation



Rear elevation



Porch spindlework



Interior with mailboxes



Interior walls and ceiling



Bethany CPR station and train lines



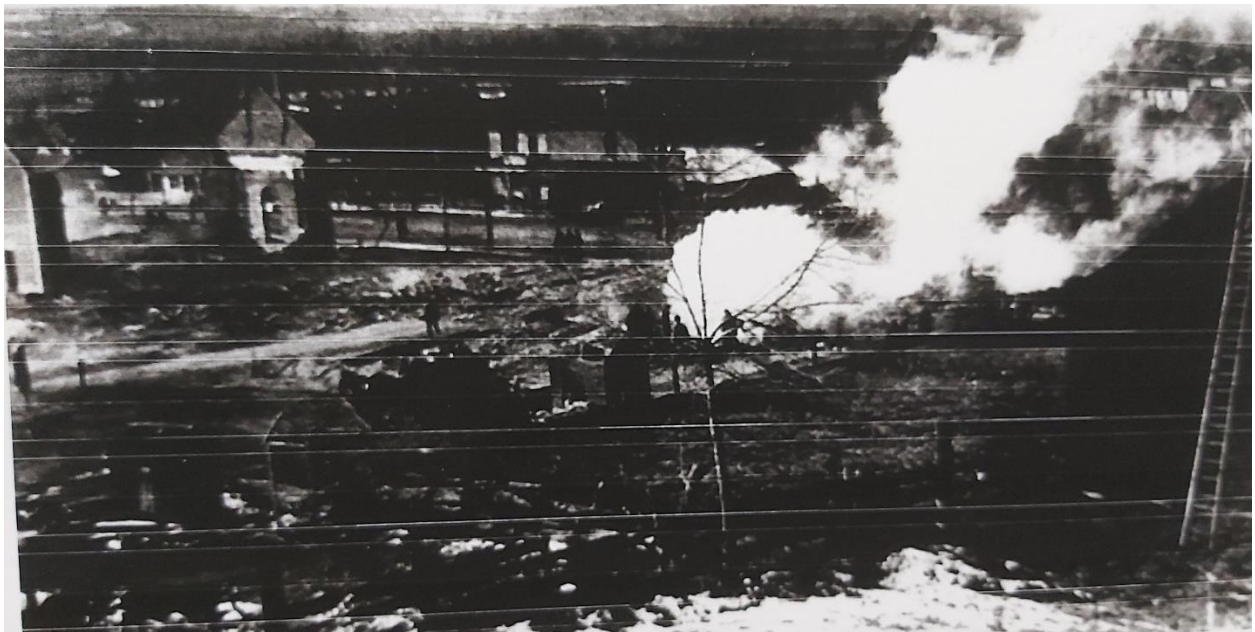
Interior as post office



Moving the post office



Bethany prior to 1911



1911 Fire



Bethany Post office, 1969

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