

1821 Victoria Road, Geographic Township of Eldon (Neal General Store)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Eldon Township

S1/2 LT 4 W/S VICTORIA RD AND S/S RICHMOND ST PL 113; PT MILL RESERVE PL 113 PT 1, 57R8157; PT STREET PL 113 CLOSED BY R413651, PT 1, 57R8307, S/T R431237; KAWARTHA LAKES 2023



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 two of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. A heritage evaluation of the property has determined that 1821 Victoria Road 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 property is a unique example of a late nineteenth century general store. Constructed around 1880 and enlarged in 1896, the property integrates key elements of late nineteenth century commercial architecture, such as the brick corbels, false façade and plate glass windows, as well as features found in rural general stores more exclusively such as the two storey porch. It is the only surviving general store of this type and size in northern Kawartha Lakes.

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

The property displays a typical degree of craftsmanship for a property of this type.

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

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with the 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 property has direct associations with the development of the community of Victoria Road after the arrival of the railway in 1872 when the area around the new station became one of the largest communities in northern Victoria County. The growth of the community brought the arrival of new stores, including the subject property, and industry and made the community a hub for the surrounding rural area.

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

The property yields information regarding the economic growth of Victoria Road in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The property also yields information on the role of the general store in rural Ontario during this period as the largest of these in the area.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:
The architect and buildings of the property are not known.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

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

The property helps support and maintain the historic hamlet character of Victoria Road where the majority of existing building stock dates from the period between approximately 1870 and 1920. The general store is one of the hamlet's surviving commercial structures and help differentiate the community from the surrounding rural area.

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

The property is historically linked to its surroundings as part of the late nineteenth century development of Victoria Road which grew rapidly through the final decades of the century. The majority of extant building stock in the hamlet dates from the period between approximately 1870 and 1920 and the subject property is linked to the surroundings properties as one of a range of late Victorian buildings within the community.

iii. is a landmark.

The property is a local landmark as a unique and highly visible former commercial structure in Victoria Road and one of the last surviving major commercial structures from the community's height. It is also a landmark for its reputation as the one-time former largest general store in Canada

Design and Physical Value

1821 Victoria Road has design and physical value as a unique example of a Victorian-era general store, both for its size as well as its unique combination of architectural elements. The property, which is also known as Neal's General Store, displays many features typical of Victorian commercial architecture erected in rural communities during this time, including its false façade, recessed storefront, two-storey porch and decorative brickwork, but the building itself is unique as a four-and-a-half storey structure and through its combination of a variety of elements, not always found together in general store buildings.

The property was constructed around 1880, and enlarged in 1896, as Neal's General Store to serve the community of Victoria Road. Although Victoria Road was a substantial local centre with a booming economy and a wide array of commercial establishments in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, its streetscape was more consistent with other more rural centres across both Victoria County and Ontario more generally, than with urban centres, such as Lindsay or Fenelon Falls. Whereas in Lindsay and Fenelon Falls around the same period had developed a dense urban streetscape with a consistent street wall employing buildings of two to three storeys in the pervasive Italianate style, Victoria Road developed in a much more piecemeal fashion with its various commercial structures growing up organically and separately from each other, detached on their own lots and very much segmented from one another. This created a vastly different streetscape overall than its urban contemporaries, and made the community, and its individual commercial buildings, more closely resembling rural and hamlet communities, or earlier urban spaces, without the same kind of commercial and industrial base that Victoria Road had in its heyday when it was home to more than thirty businesses serving a variety of different needs.

There is no one architectural style that can be classified as the general store, but through their evolution, most general stores across Canada developed similar characteristics and features which set them apart both from residential architecture and from most urban commercial forms. The architecture of the general store in Canada developed from vernacular architecture and, although different establishments across the country developed using different forms and decorative details, these structures share a common architectural evolution.

The earliest commercial buildings in what was then Upper Canada were purely functional and took on a variety of forms which were often auxiliary to residential structures. Some, such as blacksmith's shops, required specialized and detached buildings. Other, such as retail establishments could often be undertaken from the ground floor of a home and architecture evolved to respond to these functional needs. Gradually, these retail establishments

evolved into a more typical two-storey form with a retail establishment on the ground floor and living quarters for the storekeeper and his or her family on the upper storey. These early structures often resembled, or had been converted from, residential buildings and included features typical of mid-nineteenth century residential architecture, such as gable fronts and decorative bargeboard. In rural communities, many general stores operated out of buildings such as these, with the family who ran them living on site.

However, throughout the second half of the century, these structures continued to evolve to suit both their function, changing architectural taste and increasing prosperity in many communities. There was also a desire to set the general store apart from other buildings in a community and, as a result, these structures needed to evolve to less resemble residential architecture and take on their own distinct commercial character. One of the most significant developments was the evolution of the Victorian storefront, which was integrated into rural and urban commercial buildings of various uses alike. The typical Victorian storefront included a recessed entrance flanked on either side by large plate glass windows which allowed both for better lighting inside the store but also better opportunities for storekeepers to display their products to passers by; recessed entrances allowed for windows both directly facing the street, but also perpendicular to the street on either side of the entrance way, creating a much larger space to display various products. For general stores, which by their nature carried a dizzying array of different products, expanded display space was particularly useful to show case them. This development was made possible by technological advancements in glass manufacturing which made the production of sheets of glass in a large enough size possible to achieve these types of windows. Storefronts such as these became ubiquitous in commercial buildings of various sizes, styles and types throughout the second half of the century and were an important feature of general stores with even the most basic of architecture.

The evolution of these spaces to provide a residential use above the business also meant that attention had to be paid to the comfort and needs of the family upstairs. One of the major architectural features that came out of the connection between home and business was the upper storey balcony. Many general stores included a first storey porch or entranceway where large goods could be displayed outside and customers could congregate; unlike in urban areas where commercial buildings were built directly to the street, the less densely packed fabric of rural communities gave storeowners scope to include this kind of space. This porch quickly evolved to include an open upper storey balcony which ran across the width of the building and was private space for the family, giving them fresh air and privacy away from the store below which was very much a community space. The upper storey balcony was not a new development in nineteenth century Canadian architecture: it was a regular

feature in inns, taverns and hotels in rural areas and small towns where the ground floor was usually where food and drink was served, and a highly public space, and the upper storey was where the rooms were located, a more private space for those renting rooms. The inclusion of the upper storey balcony was similar in both its form and use across both types of structures and quickly became a common, although not universal, feature in general store architecture.

General stores, and other rural commercial buildings, also regularly featured false facades. False facades were used to add height, decoration and distinctiveness to a building by applying a two-storey façade over what was often a one-storey gable roofed vernacular building; sometimes, false facades were also used on larger buildings, with a two-storey building being given the appearance of a third storey through the application of a false façade. These often, but not always, featured a flat cornice and a large expanse of space for decorative architectural elements and signage. Others exhibited scalloped or stepped fronts to add additional architectural distinctiveness. Although often associated with western boom-towns, particularly as this feature is often called a boomtown façade, the use of this feature was widespread across both Ontario and Canada as a whole as merchants sought make their buildings more prominent and noticeable.

At the same time as these features were developing for rural general stores, changes were also occurring in urban commercial architecture with the adoption of the Italianate commercial style which rose in popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century. The style, which was derived from Italian Renaissance architecture, was by far the most popular style of commercial architecture in towns and urban areas in Canada in the nineteenth century and was defined by features including two- to four-storey construction, large cornices, flat roofs, Classical details, decorative brickwork, tall sash windows, and moulded window hoods. This style was sometimes replicated in rural area where general stores directly transplanted these urban forms into smaller buildings. However, the style itself was highly urban, having developed in a context where height and a focus on the front façade were necessary due to their location in dense urban spaces, and they were not always appropriate for smaller communities where most buildings were detached, shorter, wider, and integrated features, such as the front porch and balcony, not found in urban spaces. As a result, many of the features of the Italianate style, particularly its decorative elements, were transplanted on their own to general stores to help mark them out as commercial buildings at a time when commercial architecture was strongly associated with the Italianate style because the style as a whole was not fully always suited for rural spaces. Stylistically, however, general stores remained highly diverse. While Italianate and Classical elements, including cornices, columns and decorative brickwork,

were popular and reproduced extensively, other buildings integrated elements more commonly found in Gothic and Queen Anne style residential architecture, including decorative woodwork and shingles, arched windows, and gable dormers, to add character and interest, sometimes in combination with Italianate elements. Similarly, while most urban Italianate commercial buildings were constructed in brick, many rural general stores were built in wood, meaning that stylistic features and forms had to be adopted both to suit the context, but also to the material that these structures were constructed in.

When viewed in the context of the development of general stores throughout the nineteenth century, 1821 Victoria Road contains a range of typical features of this architectural type, but is also highly unique. One of the most unique things about the store is its size. While most general stores were comprised of two-storeys with the store on the main floor and living quarters for the owners above, the subject property encompasses four and a half storeys, a size virtually unheard of in commercial retail of this type; the store has been rumoured to be the largest general store in Canada which, while not confirmed, is certainly possible due to its sheer size. From the street, the building appears to be the usual two storey establishment with a typical Victorian storefront at street level. Its true size, however, is concealed by its false façade and the fact that Victoria Road slopes downward to cross Grass Creek on the southern side of the property, allowing two storeys below the street level which are only visible from the south. However, the division of space remains the same as in other, smaller general stores with living quarters on the upper storey for the Neal family who owned and operated the store and retail below.

The property also features a distinct two-storey porch, which has been modified since the store was originally constructed. Like other examples, the store includes a two-storey porch on its front elevation with the bottom storey at street level and providing an entrance to the building and the upper storey connected to the living quarters above. The upper storey has been enclosed, which is very uncommon, but this is not original to the building as older images show the upper storey porch open. It is likely that the porch was enclosed in the 1920s when sunrooms were popular additions to houses and often used for sleeping porches in the hot summer months. Although not an original feature of the building, the porch as it currently appears would have been a feature of the structure when it still operated as a general store and is part of the upper storey's evolution as the Neal family home.

The store also includes both a typical Victorian storefront and a false façade. The large plate glass windows are a prominent feature on the front of the building and flank a central recessed entrance; a secondary door has since been added to create a vestibule in front of the original door, but the original entrance and its layout remain. A false façade has also been constructed to

hide the gable roofed structure behind and, like the rest of the building is executed in buff brick. The façade is stepped – a feature found in a variety of Canadian general stores – and includes decorative brick corbelling, which is taken directly from Italianate architecture. In addition, the building incorporates a range of different features from different styles popular in the late nineteenth century, including the gable dormers on the side elevations, radiating voussoirs and arches windows.

1821 Victoria Road is an eclectic mix of architectural style which both fits within the idiom of general store design in the second half of the nineteenth century and is itself a very unique structure, in a large part because of its massive size. It is a unique structure within Kawartha Lakes where there are no other comparable buildings, but also clearly demonstrates the features prevalent in general stores during this period, notably the two-storey porch, false façade and Victorian storefront, all of which are recognizable features of this building type and set it apart from other structures in the community with residential or institutional use.

Historical and Associative Value

1821 Victoria Road has historical and associative value for its direct association with the economic and demographic development of Victoria Road in the period between approximately 1870 and 1920 when the community evolved into the largest settlement in northern Kawartha Lakes with the arrival of the railway. The growth of the community brought a variety of new economic opportunities including the arrival of new retail establishments. As a former general store, the property yields information regarding the role of general stores in rural Kawartha Lakes and rural Canada more generally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The community of Victoria Road developed in the 1870s at the intersection of Carden, Eldon and Bexley Townships with the arrival of the railway in 1872. Settlement and lumbering operations existed in this area prior to the 1870s, in part due to the Victoria Road, after which the community was named, the 1860s era colonization road which ran north from Glenarm to Vankoughnet near Bracebridge. The earliest settlers were Irish Catholics who formed a small settlement just to the north of the present-day community. There were also lumber operations and camps in the surrounding area which was covered in substantial stands of white pine; the lumber industry had begun to develop as a significant economic driver in the mid-century and was spreading north throughout the 1860s and 1870s as new stands of pine were identified and cut. However, the settlement did not fully develop until the Toronto and Nipissing Railway identified it as a station stop along the route it was developing in the early 1870s.

The Toronto and Nipissing Railway was the brainchild of George Laidlaw, the railway magnate and owner of the well-known Laidlaw Estate and Fort Ranch on Balsam Lake, and William Gooderham, of the distillery Gooderham and Worts. The line, which was constructed during a period of substantial expansion of regional railways throughout central Ontario, was intended primarily for freight to service the Gooderham and Worts complex in Toronto by providing direct access to cordwood from the surrounding forests. The line first opened in 1871 with service between Uxbridge and Scarborough and expanded northwards over the next several years; the intention was to extend as far as Lake Nipissing to reach a proposed transcontinental line. This goal was never reached as the line terminated at Coboconk and was never extended. For northern Victoria County, however, the line was a huge boon to its communities and businesses as it allowed for the transport of people in and out of the region and, more importantly, freight carriage. In particular, the line carried wood – both cordwood and lumber – and agricultural products south to the province’s primary population centres.

For Victoria Road, the arrival of the line meant the area quickly became a hub for commercial and industrial activity and soon people and businesses were arriving in the community to settle. This included both people coming to the community itself and taking up the agricultural lots in the surrounding area to benefit from the growing community and the booming lumber industry which was operating in the region in the late nineteenth century. By the early 1880s, the community had grown to include five general stores, three hotels, three livery stables and blacksmith’s shops, a grist mill, several saw and lumber-related mills, two churches and a variety of services, such as a doctor and undertaker; at its height there were over thirty retail establishments and it was believed that the community was on track to challenge Lindsay as the county’s economic centre. Major employers included not only the lumber industry, which was the primary employer in northern Victoria County for almost the entirety of the second half of the nineteenth century, but also included a peat cutting operation, a large limestone quarry, and the nearby Raven Lake Cement Company. The population of the community reached 350 people by late century, but it also served the surrounding area and its dispersed agricultural population as well as the more transient population of the lumber camps in the nearby region.

The population of the village peaked in the late nineteenth century, but it continued to be a prosperous local centre following the First World War, although the Great Depression signalled the community’s decline; plans and surveys of the community were developed to accommodate future growth, but this never materialized. Although the lumber industry was a substantially smaller economic driver, the other industries, including certain types of agriculture, the peat bog and cement plant, as well as other local businesses,

including hotels, retail establishments, a grist mill and saw mill, continued to drive the fortunes of the community. This included five general stores, a substantial number for a rural community, but which reflected the economic conditions of the community that arose in the late nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. The subject property was known as the Neal General Store, and was operated by several generations of the Neal family from its opening around 1880. It was by far the largest retail establishment in Victoria Road and was probably the largest in all of northern Victoria County. Like the other four stores in the community, the Neal General Store was established specifically in response to the growth of Victoria Road as a population centre in the 1870s where people, both those who lived directly in the community and those in the surrounding rural area, required access to a variety of products from retail establishments and for which general stores were often the only local source.

General stores were central aspects of community life in nineteenth century Ontario as the primary retail source for rural families and their establishment in an area was a significant boon for settlers and their ability to purchase goods they needed. Nineteenth century settlers have often been viewed and discussed as if they were entirely self-sufficient on the produce of their own farms, but this is not an accurate picture of nineteenth century life. Particularly in areas such as northern Victoria County where farming was extremely difficult, settlers always relied on products brought into their communities, whether they were coming from urban areas across the province or from international sources. Many of these items, such as sugar or tea, were standard aspects of everyday Victorian diets and simply could not be produced in Canadian climates; others, such as cottons and iron goods, were mass manufactured products that were not feasible for settlers to make on their own farms but were easy to purchase with the development of new manufacturing techniques and the rapid industrialization of urban areas during this same period. For those who lived in hamlets and were not farming themselves, more basic and local food products, such as meat and eggs, were also required for purchase.

For rural communities, general stores provided a source for these vital goods in close proximity to their own homes and farms. In areas where there was not general store in close proximity, settlers had to travel large distances to get supplies which was inconvenient, difficult and extremely time consuming; in the early and mid-nineteenth century, settlers in central and northern Victoria County often travelled to Peterborough to get supplies which was a substantial journey over days or weeks during this period. However, when a general store was established in a community, it meant that this type of travel was no longer required to access basic goods and often communities developed in close proximity to general stores, when they were established

independently, or their opening in a small community often led to increased economic activity locally because they allowed people to access goods and products more efficiently. For farmers, general stores also provided a place to sell their products locally; although the increasingly interconnected provincial economy in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that many products were shipped elsewhere, many still stayed in local areas and general stores provided a vital link between farmers and customers, particularly with more perishable products such as fruits and vegetables. Larger hamlets and villages often ended up with more than one store of this type, as a growing population led to an increased demand for products.

When examining the types of products that general stores were selling in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a number of trends emerge. In the majority of stores for which data exists and had been studied, hardware and textiles form the two largest categories of purchases and this is reflective of the growth of cheap manufacturing for both of these categories of items which led them to be purchased from the store, as opposed to made at home. Cotton manufacturing, for example, was virtually non-existent prior to the nineteenth century and wool, which could easily be processed by homes industries was the dominant textile in Britain and its settler colonies. However, the advent of new industrial technologies for spinning and weaving as well as the rise of steam power, the production of textile moved factories which could produce fabric cheaper and faster than people could make it on their own; as a result and by the second half of the nineteenth century, it became more cost and time effective for settlers in Canada to purchase cotton made in mills in Lancashire, the heart of the British textile industry, to make their clothes than to spin and weave their own wool for every garment. The same was true for products such as nails which underwent a similar shift to industrial production. In rural Ontario, the general store became the key conduit between these larger manufacturing trends and the everyday needs of families for whom it now made more sense to buy, as opposed to make, many of the vital items they required. Although mail order catalogues made their first appearance in Canada in the 1880s and provided a much greater range of products for purchase than the local store, ordering these items from the general store was often easier in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and it continued to be an important supplier of non-grocery products into the early twentieth century.

The other major item which dominated general store was flour, an extremely important commodity that most settler families were using every day. Although many early settlers grew or attempted to grow their own grains, including but not limited to wheat, not every area in the province was suitable for this on a large scale. Similarly, by the second half of the nineteenth century, many farms, particularly in parts of southern Ontario which had been settled

since the late eighteenth century, were beginning to produce products for market beyond their own farm and own communities; although wheat had always been exported to Britain, the mid-century marked a period of uptick in production and exports and a move away from local to more global and industrialized production. By the end of the century and the expansion of settlement into the Canadian Prairies, wheat and flour were commodities produced on an industrial scale, certainly when compared to the early decades of the nineteenth century, and were readily and cheaply available for purchase. While northern Victoria County did produce a variety of grains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the ability to purchase flour was still extremely important for people in and around Victoria Road, particularly as agriculture became more specialized, farm families were not necessarily growing wheat as it was not the area's primary agricultural product. Similar, many residents of the community and surrounding area were not farmers and the ability to buy flour in the local store was vital for families and their diets.

General stores did not just cater to the everyday needs of local families, however; they also acted as wholesalers for a variety of local businesses and industries. In central Ontario in the second half of the nineteenth century, the largest client of many general stores were the lumber camps operating throughout the region from the 1860s to the end of the century. Buyers for the camps relied on general stores in close proximity to their camps to purchase essentials such as flour, pork, tea and sugar which were needed throughout the winter; products that could be grown locally were purchased from local farmers, but general stores were often used as intermediaries between the buyer, who generally already had a relationship with the store, and the supplier. Similarly, for imported and manufactured products, such as tools, or for certain types of raw materials, such as iron, the general store often acted as the local supplier and wholesalers for various businesses within the community. It cannot be verified if the store at Victoria Road functioned in either of these capacities, but it is highly likely, particularly with regard to supplying lumber camps which most general stores in lumber producing areas did; as the largest general store in the area, it is the most likely to have been a substantial wholesaler and industrial supplier.

The storekeepers were often significant figures in their communities and someone well-known to most people in the surrounding area. In addition to providing goods for people to purchase and ordering supplies required, storekeepers sometimes acted in other capacities such as post master or banker as sometimes the local post office was contained within the general store, particularly in very small communities, or the lack of access to established banks in larger centres meant that storekeepers often gave loans and credit where those in urban areas would access formal banking services. More informally, general stores were centres of community life and many

storekeepers strove to help make them so such as allowing gatherings in the space such as gathering to listen to the radio.

While the exact activities of the Neal General Store from its founding are not entirely known, it is certain that it fulfilled these roles beginning in the 1880s until its closure. What sets the store apart from other similar establishments is its size; with four-and-half stories, it is one of the largest retail buildings in Kawartha Lakes as a whole including in urban areas. How the building was originally laid out is not clear, but by the early twentieth century, it had been divided into areas for different activities. The lowest storey was set aside for deliveries, as well as egg grading and butchering, and was not a retail space. The retail areas began on the next floor where the bakery and baked goods were located. Above this was the grocery floor followed by a floor for dry goods and the store office, with the living space for the storekeeper and family on the top floor. By the time it was arranged in this way during the 1930s and 1940s, it had shifted substantially grocery sales, which aligns with the increased availability of home products, including hardware and textiles, from mail order services.

In addition to its role as a central retail establishment for a wide array of goods, one of the store's key functions in the community and surrounding area as an important shipping point for beef and grain in for Carden, Bexley and northern Eldon Townships. The area around Victoria Road had primarily been settled for agricultural purposes, with the understanding that the lumber industry which was also operating in the area would provide a ready market for produce. The land was marginal, however, and the gradual decline of the lumber industry in the closing decades of the nineteenth century meant that mixed farming also rapidly declined. By the early twentieth century, the agricultural landscape had focussed on products that the cooler climate and more marginal soil conditions could profitably support, namely certain types of grains and cattle. The 1901 census provides insight on the agricultural conditions of the region, including the products produced, although it does not provide statistics by township. The aggregated data shows the grain crop production of northern Victoria County, as a whole, was half, or sometimes less than half depending on the product, than in southern Victoria County; the area did, however, have good production with regard to spring wheat, oats and rye. There was also a substantial amount of cattle production occurring in the northern part of the county, particularly in Carden Township where ranching had grown into a substantial economic driver. In order to sustain this industry, the product had to be shipped out of the community and the general store provided the primary shipping point where farmers could bring their produce, meat could be butchered and shipped out. Live cattle were also shipped from Victoria Road across central and southern Ontario. Until the mid-twentieth century, a substantial amount of agricultural products was shipped out by

train, gradually replaced by trucks. The store was, in fact, enlarged in 1896 to support this function.

The role of the Victoria Road store in community life in the 1800s is not entirely clear but community recollections from the early twentieth century confirm its role as a community hub. At this time, Victoria Road was still a substantial community and primary centre in northern Victoria County and the store, which was not the only one in the community, still played a large role in the village. Community members have recollected the many people who frequented the establishment, both to purchase goods and to socialize; for example, in the 1930s, people would gather on the main floor to listen to the hockey game on the radio at a time when not everyone owned a radio or had electricity and gathering at the general store was a time to social and engage in sport together. The store also proved vital with regard to the provision of electricity itself; W.A. Neal, the owner of the store, joined with several other local businessmen to form a local electrical company for the village which was provided through a large generator.

The Neal General Store was a central commercial enterprise in Victoria Road throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and, through that role, provides substantial information regarding the community's economic growth during this period. It yields information regarding the role and function of general store in rural communities at the time, which was substantial and extremely important as a supplier of goods, both to individuals and as a wholesaler, but also as an important community space. The store was a vital location in Victoria Road from its establishment in 1880 until well into the twentieth century as the community grew, evolved and gradually declined.

Contextual Value

1821 Victoria Road has contextual value as part of the historic landscape of the community of Victoria Road as one of its major former commercial buildings. Through its former use and architecture, it maintains and supports the historic character of Victoria Road as a hamlet within the wider rural area in Eldon, Bexley and Carden Townships. The property is historically linked to its surroundings as part of the historic development of Victoria Road in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The property is also a specific landmark as a well-known former commercial building in the community as well as for its reputation as the one-time former largest general store in Canada.

The hamlet of Victoria Road developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, but its growth intensified with the establishment of the Toronto and Nipissing Railway station in 1872. Over the next several decades, it grew into the largest community in northern Victoria County and, along with an economic boom, it also experienced a building boom with a substantial

amount of its building stock, including the subject property, being erected in the period between 1870 and 1920. The community experienced a rapid decline throughout the mid-twentieth century, however, and it has substantially shrunk from its heyday at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite these changes, the community has retained a substantial amount of its late nineteenth and early twentieth century building stock and, although buildings have certainly been lost in the ensuing century, its nineteenth century landscape is remarkably intact and it retains its character as a late nineteenth century settlement as expressed through its architecture.

The subject property helps maintain and support this historic hamlet character as one of its primary commercial buildings; several commercial buildings remain in its immediate vicinity. At the same time, it is historically and visually linked to its surroundings as part of a concentrated period of development in the late nineteenth century and as one of a range of extant Victorian buildings in the community. The general store was constructed around 1880 and is contemporary to most of the other historic structures in the hamlet. Although it is different from a functional standpoint to the residential and institutional structures that remain extant, it is constructed in an architectural style consistent with other buildings in the community, which includes a wide array of Victorian structures. This includes residential properties built in both brick and wood, as well as institutional structures including the former Toronto and Nipissing station and several local churches. In addition, the concentration of buildings in this area, including its residential, institutional and commercial structures, differentiate the hamlet from the surrounding rural area which is sparsely populated and not built up; Victoria Road stands in contrast to this with its denser, more urban built forms and more concentrated settlement patterns. The general store fits into this pattern of more urban development in order to maintain discernable nature of the hamlet.

The former general store is also a local landmark due to its size and location along Victoria Road within the hamlet of Victoria Road, as well as its role as the former Neal General Store. The property is located directly adjacent to the road – the former colonization road main thoroughfare through the community – and is built to the sidewalk. Grass Creek runs directly to the south of the building and forms a gently sloping bank that runs from the water to the base of the structure; this means that those approaching the property from the south are looking up at the building, emphasizing its substantial size and massing. Views of the structure can be seen from a number of angles, but most notably from along Victoria Road and the central intersection of the community at Victoria Road and Richmond Street. It is one of the major historic structures within the community and is known both in the surrounding area and Kawartha Lakes more generally for its distinct architecture and substantial size. The store is widely regarded as being the inspiration for the

general store in Denis Patrick Sears' 1974 novel, *Lark in the Clear Air*, which is set in a fictional version of historic Victoria County.

The store is only one of five former general stores located in Victoria Road, although several have been demolished. Of those remaining, it is by far the largest, most distinctive and most architecturally prominent. In fact, by the early twentieth century, the store had gained the reputation for being the largest general store in Canada. Whether or not this is true is unknown, and nearly impossible to verify, but this reputation speaks to the landmark nature of this structure within the community. The store was a central hub for shopping, as well as shipping in the late nineteenth and twentieth century and was extremely well-known both within the community and the surroundings rural area. It was certainly the largest general store in Kawartha Lakes after its enlargement in 1896 and became a landmark building within both Victoria Road, and its largest historic building, and the surroundings area as a centre for community life.

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

1821 Victoria Road has design and physical value as a unique example of a late nineteenth century general store. Constructed around 1880, the building displays characteristics typical of rural general store design in the second half of the nineteenth century, including its false façade, recessed storefront with plate glass windows, and two-storey balcony. It is unique in its size, as the largest general store building in Kawartha Lakes at over four storeys in height, and in its distinctive combination of a range as well as decorative features from other architectural styles including its brick corbelling, arched windows with radiating voussoirs, and gable dormers.

Historical and Associative Value

1821 Victoria Road has historical value in its direct associations with the development of the community of Victoria Road in the late nineteenth century as a major hub in northern Victoria County. The arrival of the railway in 1872 spurred the growth of the community into a substantial centre for the surrounding rural area and the subject property grew out of the community's boom at this time. The property also yields information on the role and development of general stores as a key aspect of rural life and economies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the largest general store serving the community and northern Victoria County more generally.

Contextual Value

1821 Victoria Road has contextual value as a local landmark, as well as supporting the historic hamlet character of Victoria Road. The property was once believed to be the largest general store in Canada and, through its size, massing, location and usage, is a prominent and well known local landmark in Victoria Road as the former Neal General Store. The property also supports and maintains the historic hamlet character of Victoria Road as one of a range of extant Victorian buildings that make up the community. Similarly, it is historically and visually linked to its surroundings as part of the major period of development of community between approximately 1870 and 1920 and one of a range of buildings in the community constructed in a range of Victorian styles with similar architectural characteristics.

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 Attributes

The design and physical attributes support the value of the property as a unique example of late nineteenth century general store architecture in Kawartha Lakes.

- Four-and-a-half storey buff brick construction
- Gable roof
- Stepped false façade
- Brick corbels
- Gable dormers
- Victorian storefront including:
 - Plate glass windows
 - Recessed entrance
 - Wooden surround
- Fenestration including:
 - Arched sash windows
 - Radiating voussoirs
- Two storey porch including:
 - Square columns
 - Decorative woodwork
 - Enclosed 1920s upper storey sunroom with multipane windows
- Stone foundation
- Delivery entrance

Historical and Associative Attributes

The historical and associative attributes support the value of the property as a former general store which yields information regarding the development of Victoria Road and the role of the general store in rural life.

- Former role as a general store
- Architectural elements including:
 - Recessed storefront
 - False façade
 - Two-storey porch

Contextual Attributes

The contextual attributes support the value of the property as a contributing feature to the historic landscape of Victoria Road and as a local landmark.

- Location along and orientation towards Victoria Road
- Location on the north side of Grass Creek

- Views of Victoria Road, surrounding historic properties, and Grass Creek from the property
- Views of the property from Victoria Road and surrounding historic properties

Images



Neal General Store, c. 1910









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