16-22 King Street East, Village of Omemee (Commercial House Hotel)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Omemee

LT S/S KING ST AND E/S STURGEON ST PL 109; PT LT 3 S/S KING ST AND E/S STURGEON ST PL 109; PT LT 4 S/S KING ST AND E/S STURGEON ST PL 109

2024

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 two of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. Staff have determined that 16-22 King Street East 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:

16-22 King Street East was constructed in 1893 and is a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial block in Omemee. There are several example of this type of commercial structure that remain extant in Omemee, although they are rare elsewhere in Kawartha Lakes. The property demonstrates key features of the style including its characteristic mansard roof with dormer windows, brackets, and decorative brickwork.

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 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 property has direct associations with the historic Commercial House Hotel which occupied this property from 1893 to the early 1910s. The property was one of several hotels in Omemee in the late nineteenth century and has historical associations with the local hospitality industry which grew throughout the second half of the nineteenth century as part of the village's commercial development.

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 introduction of the local option in Omemee in 1909. As the last remaining hotel in the village at that time, it demonstrates the impact of the local option on the hospitality industry in the early years of the twentieth century and yields information regarding the temperance movement in Ontario.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:
The building or designer of the building 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 property helps maintain and support the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of several Second Empire style commercial buildings along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the south side of King Street.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:
The property is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the historic commercial landscape of downtown Omemee. It forms part of the historic streetwall along the south side of King Street and is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings from the early 1890s that form the downtown core of the village.

iii. is a landmark.
The property is not a specific landmark.

Design and Physical Value

16-22 King Street East has design and physical value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial building in Omemee. The style, which was popular at the end of the nineteenth century, is relatively rare in Kawartha Lakes, although there are several extant examples in Omemee. The subject property, constructed in 1893 as a downtown hotel, is a good example of the style and demonstrates its key features including the characteristic mansard roof, dormer windows, and pilasters. It is representative of the execution of this style in Omemee in the early 1890s when the commercial core of the village underwent a period of reconstruction after a series of devastating fires.

Commercial architecture in Canada's cities, towns and villages, including Omemee, underwent a period of significant evolution throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest commercial architecture was purely functional, such as small general stores or blacksmith's shops in nascent communities where the proprietors would build a structure, often in a vernacular style, near or adjacent to their residence. As the century wore on, these structures often took on the stylistic trappings of contemporary architectural styles, but remained relatively basic detached structures on their own lots. A new structural type also developed: a two-storey structure with the commercial establishment on the main floor and the business owner's residence on the upper storey. Architecturally, these buildings still generally resembled residential structures although the ground floor would often have larger window to showcase the store's products. This type of arrangement was, and remained, typical for small hamlets with a few commercial enterprises.

However, with the increasing urbanization of many of the province's communities, commercial architecture was forced to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of Ontario's towns and cities; this change was not limited to Ontario and is reflective of the condition of commercial structures across North America. One of the most significant changes was the centralization of commercial structures together in downtown areas. Although the concept of formal zoning was just being developed during this period, it was a time when commercial enterprises and work were being moved outside of the home and businesses were beginning to establish their own spaces in communities; as had and was continuing to occur in urban centres in Europe, businesses naturally clustered together for convenience, creating the beginnings of the commercial downtown and the idea of a main street.

As more businesses came together to form a downtown core, their buildings began to get closer together to respond to the increasing density and desire to not waste limited space. By the mid-century, the idea of commercial buildings being linked in a continuous street wall was common in urban areas as commercial structures were built directly adjacent to one another and even

shared dividing walls. This arrangement was a direct mirror of European urban spaces where tightly packed commercial cores necessitated buildings attached to one another, and built directly to the edge of the lot to maximize space. In the early days of this new commercial arrangement, two types of buildings prevailed. The first were two- to three storey buildings similar to a basic Georgian plan, and often with a gable roof divided by a parapet wall, forming a continuous gable along the street; good examples of this type of structure can be seen in Kingston where a substantial portion of the downtown developed during this time. Like their predecessors, these invariably included commercial space on the ground floor with residential space on the second and third storeys; the third storey was often located in the gable and included dormers windows for light. This was a continuation of the two-part commercial block which had developed in the first part of the nineteenth century. The second was the use of false facades to create the look of a much taller building when in fact, a flat rectangular façade was applied to a much small, generally gable roofed structure behind it. These were usually built in wood and located in areas where erecting a large commercial building was not feasible. Examples of this type of commercial architecture are less common because they were often replaced with larger brick buildings, but there are extant examples in Kawartha Lakes, particularly in Bethany where several of these structure are still standing. In both types, the idea of the storefront had developed with large windows and often a recessed entrance to show off products and entice shoppers inside. Whichever form of architecture they used, these mid-century streetscapes were often an eclectic mix of architectural forms but represented the shift towards a highly urbanized downtown with densely packed buildings, a continuous street wall and distinctive commercial architecture separate from purely residential spaces.

By the late 1850s, new architectural styles had evolved to respond to the need for urban commercial space. The most common of these was the Italianate which was ubiquitous in commercial downtowns throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Characterized by its exaggerated use of Italian and other European Renaissance architecture such as wide eaves with decorative brackets, decorative brick and iron work and arched windows with elaborate hoods and surrounds along with flat roofs and expansive cornices, the style suited itself well to compact, high density commercial spaces where ornament could be applied to the front façade of a building to maximum effect. The majority were two to four storeys high enough to create upper storey residential or, by this time, office space, but still short enough to allow a person to comfortably ascend to the top storey by the stairs. This gave architects several storeys, albeit only on one side, of a building to craft ornate and decorative spaces.

The other major style for commercial buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century was the Second Empire style. While less common than the

Italianate style, it still was a major influence of the stylistic evolution of commercial downtowns in the second half of the century, where it was combined with Italianate buildings to create a diverse streetscape, albeit one comprised of highly ornate masonry structures with similar, but distinct, aesthetic approaches.

The Second Empire style developed in the 1850s in Europe and was quickly adopted into North American urban centres. The style itself is named after the Second French Empire and the reign of Napoleon III between 1852 and 1870. During this period, Napoleon III who was determined to make Paris into a fashionable and influential cosmopolitan centre worked alongside urban planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann to reimagine and redevelop vast swathes of the city centre beginning in the 1850s. While this included vital infrastructure, such as new sewers, it also included an aesthetic reimagining of the city as older buildings were demolished to make way for wide boulevards, new parks and squares and new public and private buildings, constructed in a consciously urban form and included mansard roofs, an architectural feature that became synonymous with French architecture during this period; the mansard roof itself was developed by French architect François Mansart during the seventeenth century French Baroque period, although it did not reach the height of its popularity until two centuries later.

As a roof style, the mansard roof had a number of advantages over hipped, flat or gable roofs. It was particularly well-suited for rows of commercial buildings with upper storey offices or apartments as well as townhouses and could be used to heighten a building effectively a full storey without the additional cost of masonry. In some urban areas, it was also used to circumvent zoning restrictions as height was often only measured to the cornice line, meaning that any living space contained within a mansard roof was exempt and additional height could be added with a large mansard roof without restriction. It was also particularly well-suited to decorative embellishments which made it popular during the Victorian period where high levels of decoration were preferred: mansard roofs could support, for example, features such as ornate dormer window surrounds, elaborate cornices, polychromatic shingles in patterns shown in the large roof size, and decorative ironwork, that could be challenging to incorporate into other roof types. Flat roofs, for example, which were used in a large number of Victorian commercial buildings were not as well suited to using the roof as a medium for decoration or as a decorative feature itself.

In addition to its mansard roof, the style had a number of other key features that helped define it as separate from other architectural styles popular in the mid to late nineteenth century. With regard to its massing, the style was defined, particularly in its larger examples, by pavilion massing that broke up the large façade into defined and distinctive units; in highly urban settings

where it was used for commercial buildings and townhouses, pavilion massing was mimics through the use of pilasters and columns to divide large buildings into bays. It also typically employed a high degree of ornamentation, such as columns, brackets, rustication, cornices and iron cresting; these elements were mostly drawn from the Classical tradition, and in its day, the style was often referred to not as Second Empire, but rather as the Italian or Renaissance style as a nod to its roots in the Classical tradition. Overall, the style was consciously an urban one that adapted Classical and Baroque forms to suit the dense urban centres of the nineteenth century, both through its large and ornate interpretation in public buildings and more commonplace use for townhouses and commercial blocks.

The first examples of the Second Empire style outside of France came as early as the 1850s with structures such as the Great Western Railway Hotel at Paddington Station and several buildings within the Whitehall complex; these buildings were built at the same time as the Paris reconstruction efforts and show the rapid dissemination of architectural styles throughout Europe at this period. France, and the French court, carried significant international influence and its fashionable architectural preferences quickly spread elsewhere as others sough to mimic these trends. In particular, it was used heavily in public buildings where it was seen to exude permanence, wealth, stability and strength. It emerged in the United States in the early 1860s with the construction of Boston City Hall between 1862 and 1865 and gained particular prominence in the Reconstruction era for public buildings where it symbolic connotations extended to representation of a strong central government after years of divisive war.

In Canada, early examples began to appear in the 1860s, but the style did not gain wide popularity until the 1870s when they started to be widely used by the federal government as part of the Department of Public Works' post-Confederation building programme. These new buildings, which were intended to signify stability, permanence and the wealth and promise of a new nation, were constructed in cities across Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes, and included government offices and other federal structures, like post offices; the new buildings constructed in the Second Empire style included the first such buildings erected under this nation-building scheme, the Toronto General Post Office, constructed between 1871 and 1874. The style was also readily adopted by provincial and municipal governments for large public buildings; it should be noted, however, that most of these were located in large and prosperous urban centres as Second Empire buildings, particularly their more ornate examples, were very expensive to build and out of reach and not practical for smaller centres.

While public buildings provided the largest and most ornate examples, the Second Empire style was also quickly adapted for domestic and commercial

use. Domestic examples began appearing in pattern books as early as the 1860s and its ornate aesthetic became favoured by wealthy clients by the 1870s for new houses and mansions; significant and large examples of Second Empire domestic architecture can be found in cities and towns across Canada showcasing mansard roofs with ornate decorative features and overtly displaying the wealth of their original occupants. The style was particularly favoured for the new suburban villas of the political and business elite who began, during this period, to erect large homes on the edges of urban centres with wide lawns. It was, however, sufficiently fashionable that it was also adapted for smaller and less opulent dwellings, including single detached homes and townhouses in towns where mansard roofs were well used as additional living space. It did primarily remain an urban style, with most of its examples concentrated in towns and cities.

The style was also readily adopted for new commercial buildings. Its initial development as part of the Paris reconstruction efforts made it easily adaptable to commercial buildings elsewhere; it was eminently suited to the new urban commercial streetscapes forming in North American cities and towns that featured continuous streetwalls built to the lot line and ornate decoration on the front façade of the building. Like the Italianate style, Second Empire architecture was a good design solution for the growing compact and dense urban landscape that characterized commercial centres in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like its public and domestic counterparts, Second Empire commercial architecture was characterized first and foremost by its mansard roof with dormer windows which were easily integrated into the urban streetscape. These buildings also included a range of decorative elements drawn from the Classical traditional, including brackets, polychromatic brickwork and shingles, ornate window surrounds, and decorative brickwork, in some cases vary similar to its Italianate neighbours.

The heyday of the style was short, lasting from about 1870 to the early 1880s in Canada; by the end of the 1880s, it had fallen out of fashion in favour of other architectural styles, particularly for public buildings. It did not completely disappear, however, and examples of both domestic and commercial versions of the style continued to be erected until the end of the nineteenth century. The continuous development of commercial downtowns throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, whether precipitated by changing fashions or by fires, meant that new commercial buildings were being constructed throughout the second half of the century in dense urban cores and some designers and clients still preferred to use the Second Empire style, whether for the economy of housing a third or fourth storey in a mansard roof instead of using masonry or as result of stylistic preferences.

16-22 King Street East was constructed in 1893, well outside of the style's peak popularity. However, it followed a wider trend in Omemee itself where the

Second Empire was used extensively in commercial buildings in the early years of the 1890s. This period marked a time of major reconstruction in the commercial core of the village after three devastating fires in 1890, 1891 and 1892 that destroyed most of the commercial structures along King Street East. In rebuilding the downtown, a number of new Second Empire commercial buildings, including the subject property, were erected as replacements for older buildings destroyed in the fires. The building that the subject property replaced was also a Second Empire style structure; originally constructed as a two-storey building, a mansard roof was added to the building as a third storey in 1878.

The subject property, built as a hotel, is a simplified version of the style, replacing an older hotel on the same site, and is a corner property, meaning that it has decorative and character-defining features on both the north and east elevations of the building. As with all Second Empire style buildings, its defining feature is its bracketed mansard roof which wraps around both street-facing elevations and includes small dormers on both sides; these dormers are less ornate than some of there other counterparts in the village but this appears to have been the case since the building was constructed when viewed in relation to older images of the structure. Like some other corner Second Empire blocks, including the block across the road at 13-17 King Street East, the mansard roof on the side street is false to give the impression of a mansard roof around two sides of the façade but without actually creating that additional space. On its front elevation, the building is divided into three bays by pilasters, including a narrower central bay which is the focus of the symmetrical front façade. This bay includes a large rounded window on the top floor and a storefront on the ground level. The central bay is indicative of its former use as a hotel, where central entrances were a common architectural feature during this period, as opposed to retail commercial buildings which generally had a different ground floor layout. The larger bays also include storefronts on the ground level with large upper storey sash windows with rounded heads. These sash windows are also present on the east elevation facing George Street. Compared to other Second Empire buildings, even within Omemee, the building is very plain and does not have the same decorative brickwork that can be seen in other Second Empire structures in the downtown.

The building has been modified since it was originally constructed, specifically in the 1910s when its use began to undergo some changes. The building was originally constructed as a hotel and the central storefront served as its main entrance. This entrance was recessed and the rounded window above was a recessed balcony accessed from the second store of the building. The storefront on the right of the building was originally the front of the sample room, the room where travelling salespeople would lay out samples of their goods for local merchants to view. It had a large window to let light into the

building and an entrance on the right hand side for merchants to enter and exit the same room. The storefront on the left of the building did not exist. The building ceased operation as a hotel in the early 1920s, requiring changes in its downstairs layout. As the use of the building changed, the sample room was removed and the current storefronts were added to make the building more conducive first as residential units and then as a commercial space. At the same time, the walls in the centre bay were brought forward to allow for more interior space in the upper and lower halls; although this change did impact the front façade, the visual importance of the central bay remained with the large upper storey window and central entrance at street level. Despite these changes, however, the building retains its historic value as a representative example of the Second Empire style, and as a historical hotel, in downtown Omemee.

Historical and Associative Value

16-22 King Street East, also known as the Commercial House Hotel, has historical and associative value as a former hotel serving the community in Omemee from the end of the nineteenth century to the early 1920s. Constructed in 1893, it yields information regarding the reconstruction of Omemee after a series of fires in the early 1890s and the development of its businesses in the late nineteenth century. It has direct historical relationships with the history of commercial and economic development in Omemee as one of the community's former hotels and is directly related to the growth of its nineteenth century hospitality industry. It also yields information regarding the local option in the early twentieth century and the impact of the temperance movement on the hospitality industry during this time period.

Omemee was established in the mid-1820s with the construction of a Mill on the Pigeon River, where the village is now located. Emily Township had been formally opened for non-indigenous settlement in 1821 and, in the same year, large numbers of primarily Protestant Irish settlers arrived in the area and took up land in the southern part of Emily as well as in Cavan Township to the east. The area around what is now the village was acquired by the Cottingham family, Maurice and Mary Cottingham of County Cavan and their sons Samuel and William, who established a shanty near the river, alongside the Laidley and English families who travelled with them. By 1825, the mill was established by William Cottingham, Maurice and Mary's younger son, eventually becoming the commercial and industrial nucleus of the village; this was also the first grist mill established in what would later become Victoria County.

The first store in the community was open by 1826 and run by Samuel Cottingham in close proximity to his brother's mill. The influx of settlers in Emily Township, both the Protestant group of which the Cottinghams were a part and the Peter Robinson settlement scheme which brought large numbers of Irish Catholic settlers in the mid-1820s, meant a significant demand for

goods and the new general store served a real need in the surrounding township. The mill and store soon became the focal point for the surrounding area and, slowly, a small community began to develop in close proximity and a village plot was soon laid out, for a community then known as Williamstown. This kind of rapid growth and development of local businesses was common for early mill sites, as mills were key infrastructure in early agricultural communities and vital economic drivers; settlers often travelled long distances to access them. The post office was established in 1835, as well as a local school in the same year. 1857 saw the arrival of the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway which helped bolster the economic prospects of the village with a new and direct route to regional markets for the growing village's agricultural and other products. It was first renamed Metcalf in the 1840s and then later, Omemee. It formally incorporated as a village separate from Emily Township in 1874.

The 1858 Peterborough and Victoria Counties directory shows the progress of the village, just over thirty years from the establishment of Cottingham's mill, when its population had reached around 500 people. Of Omemee, the authors of the directory wrote:

> The principle village in the township of Emily is situated on Pigeon River, which, beside supplying it with Hydraulic power, promises to be an important inlet for the produce and lumber of the northern townships. It has one excellent flouring and grist mill, with three run of stones; a very good saw mill, and a carding and fulling mill, all worked by water power. It contains two churches – an Episcopalian and Wesleyan; a grammar school; fifteen stores – some of them are good ones; two bakeries and groceries; two taverns, and a temperance hotel; three saloons; and blacksmiths, coopers, waggon makers, show makers, tailors, carpenters, harness makers, and dress makers, in fair numbers. Omemee boasts a very excellent newspaper the "Warder" published by Mr. Joseph Cooper. It is on the line, and is one of the most important stations, of the Port Hope, Lindsay Beaverton and Railroad; and should the inhabitants be successful in procuring Government assistance to dredge and improve the navigation of Pigeon River – now capable, when the water is high, of floating a steamer to the village – there is little doubt that it will become a town of very great importance.[1]

[1] Directory of the United Counties of Peterborough and Victoria for 1858 (Peterborough: T&R White, 1858), 38.

The village contained a wide variety of stores, typical of a mid-nineteenth century small town, including the standard general stores, grocers, and blacksmiths, alongside more specialized commercial enterprises, such as coopers, tailors, harness makers and shoemakers that typically only established their businesses in communities large enough to support them. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Omemee's economy, and population boomed, as it continued to develop into an important centre for the surrounding rural townships and as a manufacturing and commercial centre, boasting saw, grist and carding mills.

Omemee reached its peak nineteenth century population by the late 1870s, with over 800 inhabitants, before slowly declining throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. This was a common trend in rural and small town Ontario around the turn of the century when an exodus was occurring from rural to urban areas as a result of shifting economic opportunities that favoured urban centres. By 1898, the Eastern Ontario Gazetteer and Directory reported a population of 600 people and a range of services and businesses, similar in many ways to the size and economic power of the community in 1858.

One of the most significant events in Omemee's history were the series of fires that swept the commercial core of the community in 1890, 1891 and 1892. Omemee, like other communities across Ontario, was significantly shaped by fires. In a time period where heating and lighting were accomplished using fireplaces, woodstoves, candles and lanterns, building fires happened frequently and spread rapidly. This was exacerbated by the fact that many buildings, until the second half of the nineteenth century, were built of wood which caught fire, burned quickly and spread easily between structures which were often clustered close together, particularly in commercial areas. Even masonry, which was increasingly used for new commercial buildings throughout the second half of the nineteenth century in part to reduce the impact of fires, was still susceptible to fires and could still be destroyed in a large blaze, albeit less easily than its predecessors.

The number of major fires in Omemee in the nineteenth century is not known, but it is known that the town suffered significantly prior to 1877 when it established its first fire brigade, in response to several large fires in the early 1870s, including one at the Ivory sawmill which narrowly avoided a much larger and more widespread blaze. By this time, many of the earliest buildings in the downtown had been replaced by newer masonry structures. The 1881 Fire Insurance plan of the village shows King Street East as a mix of masonry and wooden structures as the village slowly transitioned to a brick dominated downtown landscape.

The fires that precipitated the building of the subject property happened in rapid succession, in 1890 and 1891, followed by another fire in 1892; all of these fires were, at the time, believed to have been deliberately set, unlike most fires that this time which were accidental and usually a direct result of nineteenth century heating, cooking, and lighting. These three fires together destroyed most of downtown Omemee and precipitated a significant rebuilding effort that resulted in the landscape of the village as it now appears. The first of these fires, on June 2, 1890, began in Blackwell House, a hotel on the corner of King Street East and Colborne Street North. The Lindsay Watchman reported:

> Last Monday morning about four o'clock fire was discovered in the old Blackwell House, an old brick hotel unoccupied for some time past, and the alarm was quickly sounded. Despite the efforts of the fireman, assisted by the citizens, the flames spread rapidly, and the adjoining stores were soon ablaze… Following is a list of the losses and insurance: Blackwell House, loss $3,000, insured for $2,000; Williamson's boot and shoe store and harness shop, loss $6,000, insurance $1,800; T. Ivory and Sons, general merchants, loss estimated at $10,000, insured for $7,600; Miller's tailor shop, loss $3,500, insurance $1,500; Mrs. Marr, whose store was occupied by W.H. Spence, implement agent, loss $1,000, insurance $500. The fire is believed to have been the work of an incendiary.[2]

The second of these fires occurred on August 27, 1891. This was the largest of the 1890s fires in Omemee and began in the stables of Clark's Hotel, before the wind spread it quickly along the south side of King Street East. The fire destroyed at least eleven commercial premises, including the Great Northwestern Telegraph office and the large brick block on the southwest corner of King and George streets that contained Clark's Hotel itself, the Windsor Hotel, and Ivory's general store, which had been relocated on account of the 1890 fire to an existing storefront in that block. The fire's path also engulfed a number of residential buildings along King Street, as well as sheds, outbuildings and stables.

The last of the three major fires occurred on April 28, 1892 and finished the destruction of the downtown; only a handful of buildings survived all three fires. This fire primarily impacted the south side of King Street in the block between George and Sturgeon Streets. The Canadian Post reported:

> Omemee has had another disastrous fire, causing losses estimated at $15,000. The fire broke out last Friday night

[2] "Destructive Fire in Omemee," *Lindsay Watchman,* June 5, 1890, 5.

> about 10 o'clock, in Mr. Thomas Stephenson's old store – D. Minn's harness shop. A prompt alarm was given, and it was no time until willing hands were removing stock and contents of adjoining stores and residences. There was a strong wind that fanned the flames and it was no time until George Morrison's brick residence on the east and J.J. Lundy's building, occupied on the west by Wm. Millier, tailor, RECORDER office, and H.T. Everett, jeweller, were in flames. The fire extended to T.J. Parson's fine store and residence on the corner west of Lundy's building, burned south to Mary St., consuming all the sheds, stables, hose-house and lock up on the entire block…There is scarcely any question that the fire was the work of an incendiary, and this is the third disastrous one in the village from presumably the same cause within the past two years. The result is that over three acres, formerly the active and businesses part of the place, is now covered by rubbish of the late disastrous fires.[3]

The impact of these fires on Omemee's business community, both material and financial, cannot be overstated. A prosperous community with a range of successful businesses needed to be rebuilt, and it was beginning soon after the first fire in 1890, and continuing into the mid-1890s. The reconstruction efforts yielded a new, but remarkably consistent streetscape built primarily in the Second Empire style as some, but not all, of the pre-1890 buildings destroyed in the fires had been.

The subject property was constructed in 1893 as the Commercial House Hotel, and a replacement for an older hotel, the Windsor House Hotel that was built by William Cottingham at some point prior to 1878. The Windsor House was one of a large number of hotels in Omemee from the early twentieth century; by some estimates, there were eleven different hotels in and in close proximity to the community from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. at the time of the village's incorporation in 1874, there were five established hotels in the community. Four of these were licensed and served alcohol in their dining rooms and taverns: Metcalf House (later the Blackwell House); Bradburn House, Clark's Hotel and the Windsor House Hotel. A sixth hotel, run by George Hawkins, was unlicensed and operated as a temperance, or dry, hotel.

Hotels were a common fixture in late nineteenth century communities. In a time before rapid travel by car, more accommodation was required for travellers who could not get as far as quickly by the modes of transport

[3] "Another Disastrous Fire" *Canadian Post,* May 6, 1892, 3.

available to them, which in Omemee were either the train, after 1857, or by roads, which were generally poor. The earliest hotels catered primarily to settlers as they made their journey to their new homestead or travelled from their farms to nascent villages to purchase supplies or access facilities such as grist mill and provided both accommodations and food; the earliest hotel in Omemee is known to have existed prior to 1850, but nothing is known about it. In general, most people did not travel far except for necessities. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, travel throughout Ontario was extremely difficult with travellers relying on travel by water or on poor roads; stagecoaches were available in some areas but they were far from reliable or comfortable. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the rapid development of new railways meant that more people could and were travelling for various reasons. The new railways provided travellers with reasonably comfortable and regular travel that was rapidly being expended throughout the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s meaning more people were travelling more often and further afield.

These hotel businesses served a number of different clientele. Some of the major clients in the nineteenth century were businesses travellers, including itinerate salesmen who travelled from community to community and those who had come for specific businesses with major players in regional business of the day. Hotels such as Commercial House provided a comfortable place to stay while they were in town for business and often also offered private parlours, sample rooms for businessmen to show their products, and rooms for meetings. As the majority of hotels during this period also included taverns, business could continue over food and drink. The Commercial House was known as business hotel, as was its predecessor the Windsor House Hotel; its sample room was located on the main floor of the hotel with a large window for letting in natural light and a separate entrance for local retailers to enter and meet with suppliers. The need for accommodation for salesmen corresponded with the growth of the village as a major commercial centre for the surrounding rural area and, as the village grew, there was an increasing need for business hotels where local businesspeople and salesmen from away could do business.

Hotels at this time also catered to tourists, a newer clientele as the tourism industry in Kawartha Lakes grew throughout the 1870s and 1880s. During this period, the idea of an escape to the country for the restoration of physical and mental health was gaining significant traction amongst urban dwellers and throughout the finals decades of the century, increasing number of people were choosing to spend their summers in Kawartha Lakes to relax, enjoy the availability of outdoor summer recreation activities and restore their health before returning to the city. Although cottages eventually became the destination of choice by the early twentieth century, the majority of early tourists stayed in hotels and ate in their restaurants and taverns. Unlike other towns in Kawartha Lakes such as Bobcaygeon and Fenelon Falls, however,

Omemee was not a major tourist destination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and tourists would have formed only a small proportion of a hotel's clientele. Nevertheless, the gradual arrival of tourists throughout the late nineteenth century bolstered the need for hotels and supported their business model.

In some areas, hotels also functioned as longer term accommodation for transient and single workers. In an era when rental apartments were not as formalized as in the present day, particularly in villages, towns and smaller cities, hotels often provided longer term rental accommodation. In larger centres, hotels sometimes provided upscale housing to upper and upper middle class couples but, for the most part, the people who rented out space in hotels for longer stays were single and relatively transient, requiring a place to stay for a season, for example, or until they were able to find more long term housing. They were also generally men as young women who, for example, had moved into a community to work away from home generally stayed in boarding houses specifically for women. In areas with seasonal industries like lumbering which was a major part of Kawartha Lakes' nineteenth century economy, workers might work in the bush for the winter and come into town during the balance of the year to work in mills or other industry; this practice occurred in Kawartha Lakes. It is not documented to the extent that this occurred in Omemee's hotels but it was an extremely common practice and use of hotel space throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

As a result of these changing conditions of travel and labour, hotels were a necessity in late nineteenth century communities and Omemee was no exception, as evidenced by the large number of hotels in the village in the mid-1870s. However, by the turn of the century, things had begun to change; several of the village's late nineteenth century hotels burned down in the fires of the early 1890s, including the predecessor to the subject property, the Windsor House Hotel. While the Windsor House Hotel was rebuilt as the Commercial House, several of the other hotels were not replaced, including the Blackwell House, the site of origin for the 1890 fire and Clark's Hotel, where the 1891 fire started in the stables. In 1906, the Bradburn House Hotel, on the southwest corner of King and Sturgeon Streets burned down, leaving the Commercial House as Omemee's last surviving public house and hotel. This reflected a general economic decline in the village in the early decades of the twentieth century, with less demand for hotel accommodation meaning that replacing these buildings when they burned down was not economically viable. However, in early 1908, the hotel landscape in the village changed again with the introduction of a local option.

The local option was a central aspect of the temperance movement that banned sales of alcohol in local municipalities and was enacted at a local level. The temperance movement had emerged in the early nineteenth century and

grew in tandem with the Social Gospel movement with which it shared similar goals of societal betterment. The temperance movement believed that alcohol hindered the development of moral, pious, and economically productive society, hurt family structure and values, and had a lasting negative impact on the individual who indulged in it both with regard to their health and morality. Its growth coincided with urbanization and industrialization, including the mass manufacture of alcohol, and the increasing use of alcohol in society. The temperance movement was supported in large part by middle-class women and Protestant churches who saw alcohol as a major ill in nineteenth century society; the temperance and suffrage movements went hand-in-hand across Canada and were both heavily organized and championed by women. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance League led the charge for temperance and the legal prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol across Canada. The WCTU was, in fact, the largest non-denominational women's organization in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canada and speaks to the centrality of this movement in turn of the century life.

One of the challenges for the temperance movement in Canada was lack of support for full prohibition at the federal and provincial levels. While there was generalized support for the temperance movement and indeed for prohibition in some quarters, there were a number of factors that prevented its enactment. On one hand, the regulation of alcohol manufacture and sales were split between federal, provincial and municipal governments where the manufacture and export of alcohol was regulated federally, its sale regulated provincially and the issuance of liquor licenses was generally regulated at a municipal or local level. The other was lack of significant support, particularly along ethnic, cultural and linguistic lines. In particular, prohibition was not supported in Quebec or by French-Canadians more broadly; this was particularly challenging for the federal government where support from Quebec was paramount for forming government. Indeed, an 1898 plebiscite where the majority of voters voted for prohibition was not passed by the federal government in large part due to a lack of support from Quebec. Similarly, and overlapping significantly with the French-Canadian demographic, the Catholic Church was also not supportive of prohibition as a blanket ban, although there was certainly support for greater controls over the sale and consumption of alcohol and, in some areas at the diocesan and parish level, there was also support for localized prohibition.

As a result, the federal government passed the Canada Temperance Act, also known as the Scott Act after its sponsor Liberal Senator Richard William Scott, in 1878 which allowed municipalities to pass local regulations to prohibit the sale of alcohol within their boundaries; similar legislation, the Dunkin Act, had been passed by the Province of Canada prior to confederation in 1864. This was known colloquially as the local option, as it gave local municipalities the choice whether or not to become dry based on a local plebiscite. The ability

for municipalities to undertake this course of action was further supported in Ontario by the passed of the Local Option Act in 1890 which strengthened the federal legislation in the provincial context and required a three-fifths majority of voters to support prohibition for a local option to be enacted. This did not include women, who were not allowed to vote on local plebiscites but were the major supporters of both temperance and the local option.

The largest uptake of the local option was in the Maritimes, home to a strong temperance movement, where around 70% of municipalities had enacted a local option by the turn of the twentieth century; in 1901, PEI became the first province to enact full provincial prohibition. However, by 1916 when full prohibition was finally introduced across much of Canada, 575 of Ontario's then 851 municipalities had enacted local options, mostly in rural areas and small towns with large British and Protestant populations; urban areas, particularly those that were more ethnically and culturally diverse, were significantly less likely to support it. This did not mean that urban areas did not also enact local options in some areas, notably Toronto's Junction neighbourhood which remained dry from 1904 until 1998.

Although the ability to enact the local option was in place since the late 1870s, its enactment across the province was slow. Votes for the local option accelerated in the early twentieth century as the temperance movement continued to gather momentum and support in local option campaigns. In Omemee, the local option vote was held in January 1908 after a substantial campaign, alongside nearly 100 other municipalities across Ontario, most of which were rural areas and small towns. Omemee's voters cast their ballots 97 in favour of the local option with 55 against, just clearing the three-fifths majority required. In Victoria County, local options were also enacted in this vote in Coboconk, Kinmount, Woodville, Somerville Township and Eldon Township; local option votes were defeated in Burnt River and Bexley Township, but only by thin margins. Of the other communities that voted at the same time, many of those rejecting the local option were larger centres including Barrie, Huntsville and Parry Sound, while other larger centres, including Orillia and the middle-class commuter suburb of North Toronto voted heavily in favour.

The impact of the local option was felt particularly hard in the hospitality industry. While the temperance movement advocated for the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol, the local option did not, and could not realistically, prohibit the consumption of alcohol in private homes; it also could not prohibit the manufacture of alcohol as this industry was federally regulated. As a result, it was alcohol sales that these restrictions targeted and that primarily impacted hotels and taverns, the vast majority of which served alcohol either with meal service or on its own. Taverns and saloons that did not offer other services were hit the hardest, but other hospitality businesses were

also significantly impacted as alcohol sales were a major profit maker for hotels and restaurants.

For the Commercial House Hotel, the enactment of the local option in Omemee was a huge blow for the business. Although it offered rooms and food, it was the only hotel in the community and also the only place to purchase and consume liquor and beer. Despite the outcry around the consumption of alcohol, the establishment was generally known as a respectable establishment with the *Canadian Post* reporting when the hotel was under construction that:

> The new hotel will shortly be in shape for occupying. Shed and stables are being erected and if the right part offers as landlord, there is no better opening for a first class house. The ratepayers will only vote in favour of a license to a man who will keep good order and conduct a respectable house.[4]

Nevertheless, the local option was still enacted and even a respectable hotel was profoundly impacted. By 1912, Beatty had sold the hotel and moved out of the village. It was purchased by Jack Weir who ran the business for the next seven years before selling it again to Richard Morton in 1919; Weir operated it as a boarding room and restaurant. Richard Morton added an ice-cream parlour to the business but with the declining demand for this type of hotel accommodation after the Second World War, particularly for travelling salesmen whose businesses shifted with the advent and adoption of the automobile, the business was not profitable. Morton unsuccessfully petitioned the village to repeal the local option to allow a tavern in the business but, in 1922, he sold the property and the business closed. The building was eventually converted to several apartments and a laboratory known as Shaw Research, which produced medicinal products for much of the twentieth century, before the ground floor transitioned to commercial units.

The property also contains a one and a half storey brick building on the Mary Street side of the property which is currently used as a semi-detached residential building. However, the building was originally constructed as a blacksmith's shop for Bill Morton and is the last remaining blacksmith's shop in Omemee. It is not known when this structure was built, although it does not appear on the 1904 Fire Insurance Plan so it post-dates that mapping. The blacksmith was essential to life in nineteenth century communities, particularly prior to the widespread development of industrial foundries when blacksmiths were the primary point of call for the manufacture and repair of agricultural equipment and other tools. By the early twentieth century, when this structure

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[4] Canadian Post, January 17, 1893, quoted in C. Hillier Williamson, *Omemee* (Omemee: Pigin Publishing, 2000), 181.

was erected, the blacksmith's trade had declined with mass manufactured products easily available and many blacksmiths pivoted primarily to repairs and also to working with horses as farriers. It is likely that this blacksmith's shop, given its proximity to the hotel which had an associated livery stable at one time, was significantly horse-focussed although little is known about the business or its period of operation.

The historic use of the subject property as a hotel is an important view into the history of the hospitality business in Omemee. Hotels established in the community as part of the late nineteenth century economic boom in the village and provided important accommodation for travellers, especially for business travellers who came to the village with increasing regularity. The Commercial House Hotel was the last surviving of Omemee's late nineteenth century hotels and yields important information about this aspect of the local economy, but also about the local option and the rise of the temperance movement in the community.

Contextual Value

16-22 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintains and supports the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings dating from the 1890s along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street. It is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the village's downtown streetscape.

The subject property was constructed in 1893 as part of a general rebuilding of downtown Omemee after a series of three disastrous fires that swept the commercial core of the village in 1890, 1891 and 1892. These three fires destroyed the majority of commercial buildings along King Street, as well as a number of residential properties and outbuildings. The rebuilding effort was significant and resulted in a collection of late nineteenth century commercial architecture, including the subject property, that formed a cohesive and consistent commercial streetscape along King Street East.

The rebuilding effort produced a range of new commercial buildings, many of which are still extant in downtown Omemee and form its commercial core. What is unique about the rebuilding in Omemee was the large number of Second Empire buildings constructed there. While Second Empire buildings were popular across Canada throughout the 1870s and 1880s, they had declined significantly in popularity by the 1890s and a collection of the size that exists in Omemee is rare, both for the 1890s and in Kawartha Lakes more generally. The subject property, like others built around the same time, was erected in the Second Empire style and is physically, visually, and historically

linked to the rest of this collection, as a Second Empire style structure, as part of Omemee's 1890s reconstruction, and as part of the existing commercial streetscape. Additional Second Empire style buildings in the downtown include 13-17 King Street East, 31-37 King Street East, and 46 King Street East. These structures have a shared history as well as a shared architectural style and function in concert with one another as part of the downtown landscape.

Omemee's current commercial core stretches from approximately Sturgeon Street in the west to Colborne Street North in the east; while King Street continued both east and west beyond this, the commercial structures give way to residential and institutional buildings. Between these two cross streets, King Street East, on both the north and south sides, is lined with commercial establishments. While some have been constructed more recently, the majority date from the late nineteenth century and taken together form a cohesive, historic small town downtown area with a variety of stores and businesses. This mix of buildings is typical of downtown areas in small town Ontario that date from the late nineteenth century which generally contain a concentration of historic commercial buildings, in both the Italianate and Second Empire styles, alongside other structures, such as residences or modern commercial structures; this is also the case in Omemee. 16-22 King Street East supports and maintains this historic small town streetscape as part of this collection of buildings. Constructed in the Second Empire style, as are many of the other historic buildings in the downtown, it is built to the sidewalk and forms part of a Victorian streetwall along King Street East. These are typical features of a late Victorian downtown that are maintained by this extant structure in combination with the other late Victorian commercial buildings that form part of this historic landscape.

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, constitution the Reasons for Designation required under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

Design and Physical Value

16-22 King Street East has design and physical value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial building in Omemee. The style, which was popular at the end of the nineteenth century, is relatively rare in Kawartha Lakes, although there are several extant examples in Omemee. The subject property, constructed in 1893 as a downtown hotel, is a good example of the style and demonstrates its key features including the characteristic mansard roof, dormer windows, and pilasters. It is representative of the execution of this style in Omemee in the early 1890s when the commercial core of the village underwent a period of reconstruction after a series of devastating fires.

Historical and Associative Value

16-22 King Street East, also known as the Commercial House Hotel, has historical and associative value as a former hotel serving the community in Omemee from the end of the nineteenth century to the early 1920s. Constructed in 1893, it yields information regarding the reconstruction of Omemee after a series of fires in the early 1890s and the development of its businesses in the late nineteenth century. It has direct historical relationships with the history of commercial and economic development in Omemee as one of the community's former hotels and is directly related to the growth of its nineteenth century hospitality industry. It also yields information regarding the local option in the early twentieth century and the impact of the temperance movement on the hospitality industry during this time period.

Contextual Value

16-22 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintains and supports the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of late nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. It is one of a collection of Second Empire style commercial buildings dating from the 1890s along the street and forms part of the historic streetwall along the north side of King Street. It is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the village's downtown streetscape.

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 of the property support its value as a representative example of a Second Empire style commercial property in Omemee.

- Two-and-a-half storey buff brick construction
- Mansard roof including:
  - Dormer windows
  - Cornice
  - Brackets
- Pilasters
- Brackets
- Wide eaves
- Central entrance along King Street East
- George Street South entrance
- Storefronts
- Fenestration including:
  - Rounded sash windows
  - Transoms
  - Central rounded upper storey window on King Street East elevation
- One-and-a-half storey former blacksmith's shop including:
  - Brick construction
  - Gambrel roof

Historical and Associative Attributes

The historical and associative attributes of the property support its value as a former local hotel and in its role as part of the history of commercial development and the post-1890 reconstruction of Omemee.

- Former use as the Commercial House Hotel
- Relationship to the history of commercial development in Omemee
- Relationship to other buildings erected as part of the post-1890 reconstruction of Omemee

Contextual Attributes

The contextual attributes of the property support its value as a contributing feature to the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee.

- Construction on the southwest corner of King Street East and George Street

- Construction to the lot line
- Views of the property along King Street East and George Street South
- Views from the property along King Street East and George Street South
- Relationship to other Second Empire style buildings in downtown Omemee

Images

Downtown Omemee, 1900

Cheryl-Lynn's
Hair Design
Cheryl-Lynn's
Hair Design

iron butterfly
jewellery
Library
FOODLAND

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