

24-26 King Street East, Village of Omemee (McNeely's General Store)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Omemee

LT 6 S/S KING ST AND E/S STURGEON ST PL 109; CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES
2024



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 24-26 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:

The property is a unique example of Victorian commercial architecture. Drawing from the Italianate style, the property exhibits key Victorian design trends in commercial building such as pilasters, decorative brickwork and the division of the façade into bays, but it is unique within the Omemeë streetscape for its distinctive architecture including its gable roof with eyebrow dormers which is atypical of Italianate design. It is unique as one of only five downtown commercial buildings in Omemeë that predate 1890.

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

The property displays a typical degree of craftsmanship for a building 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 local businessman Isaac McNeely who owned and occupied the building from 1868 to his death in 1892. Under both him, it was used as a general store and, as such, an important local retail establishment in Omemeë.

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 commercial development of Omemeë in the second half of the nineteenth century and the role of the general store in nineteenth century communities.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to the community:
The designer and builder of the property 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 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 forms part of a collection of historic commercial buildings along King Street that helps define both the commercial core of the village and the overall small town character of Omemee.

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 line of commercial buildings along the south side of King Street that help form the downtown core of the village. It is also historically linked to the five surviving commercial buildings in downtown Omemee that pre-date the major fires of the early 1890s.

iii. is a landmark.

The property is not a specific landmark.

Design and Physical Value

24-26 King Street has design and physical value as a unique example of a Victorian commercial building in Omemee and one of the oldest extant commercial buildings in the village. Constructed around 1868, it is primarily constructed in the Italianate commercial style, the most popular style for downtown commercial architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century but includes a unique gable roof with eyebrow dormers, an atypical feature for Italianate commercial architecture. Key architectural features from the Italianate style include its two-storey red brick construction, decorative brick coursing and division of the façade into bays by pilasters. It is one of only five downtown commercial buildings in Omemee that predate 1890.

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 dormer 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 smaller, 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 structures 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, a new architectural style had evolved to respond to the need for urban commercial space. The Italianate style had become popular in residential architecture integrated elements from Italian and other European Renaissance architecture into eclectic and often exaggerated combinations. Features such as columns and pilasters were common, as well as wide eaves with decorative brackets, decorative brick and iron work and arched windows with elaborate hoods and surrounds. Increasing mobility and the growth of pattern books allowed people in North America to see and experience European architecture and it was increasingly something seen as being desirable to imitate and adapt for the North American context.

This style was quickly adapted into commercial architecture where its decorative elements could be easily applied to the facades of downtown structures. With the high density of commercial buildings, and the fact that they now shared walls, the front façade of the structure was the only one that was seen from the street. As a result, builders and architects focussed on this side of the structure as the focal point for decoration and ornamentation. The

space for this type of work on these buildings was substantial: the increasing density of urban downtown necessitated buildings going up, instead of out, and by the 1860s, the majority of commercial buildings in downtown areas 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

By the 1860s, a new standard form for downtown commercial buildings had fully emerged. These buildings, which like their predecessors were linked together in a continuous streetwall, were generally two to four storeys in height with commercial space on the ground floor and residential or office space upstairs. The commercial space on the ground floor generally included large plate glass windows and a recessed entrance which allowed for a substantial amount of display area visible from the street. This was not always the case for non-retail establishments such as hotels where the ground floor might have been used as a tavern so required a different orientation and focus and less visibility to the interior. The upper storeys were generally similar to one another with bands of tall sash windows differentiating each floor and the façade often divided into repeating bays by pilasters. These upper storeys also included extensive decorative elements, such as decorative brickwork in a variety of patterns, elaborate window hoods and large and heavy cornices. A flat, or gently sloping, roof was hidden behind the cornice. When placed together as part of a block of these structures, each individual building was distinct, but fit into a wider cohesive whole with consistent styling and massing.

Technological advancements were integral in making this style, and its widespread adoption, possible. Advances in glass manufacturing made the glass storefront possible, with newer larger pieces of plate glass facilitating the substantial expanses of glass necessary for the large uninterrupted windows. The elaborate ornamentation was also made possible by advances in cast iron manufacturing technology which allowed for the creation of prefabricated metalwork that could be ordered and applied to a building's surface and were substantially cheaper than bespoke and handmade decorative features. Most of the elaborate cornices and window hoods were made in this way and prefabrication allowed for consistent decoration to be applied across the façade of a structure. At the same time, increased mechanization in brick manufacturing made large quantities of brick available for use on structures of this size.

The redevelopment of many downtowns across Ontario in this style was not gradual and occurred rapidly between the 1860s and 1880s, although Italianate commercial buildings were still being constructed, although with less regularity, into the 1890s. Many business and property owners were eager to

adopt the new style and it quickly gained popularity as the go-to style for new commercial architecture. The late Victorian era was where architectural style was seen as being imbued with meaning, and Italianate commercial architecture was no exception. Italianate architecture, similar to other Neoclassical forms, was often associated with business and commerce due to its historical connection with ancient Greece and Rome, as well as the commercial centres of Renaissance-era Italy. Therefore, it was seen as an appropriate style for commercial downtown buildings, in a similar way that the Gothic Revival style was seen to be appropriate for ecclesiastical buildings because of its wider historic and conceptual associations with medieval Christianity. Similarly, the style very quickly came to represent a prosperous and economically vibrant community and to create a sense of permanence and confidence in the urban commercial landscape. As a result, business owners wanted to construct these types of buildings to help demonstrate their successes and promote an image of a prosperous community which, by extension, would increase visitation and investment in a community.

While the cost of buildings structures of this type was substantially decreased by the development of prefabricated decorative elements and mass produced bricks, it was still expensive to erect a building of this type. Many business owners were keen to develop blocks of these structures in concert to provide a consistent aesthetic throughout a downtown area, but it represented a substantial financial investment in building stock. Fire often provided the impetus, and the opportunity, for redevelopment and the application of a consistent architectural style and size across an entire connected streetscape. Many early commercial downtowns were built with a substantial number of wooden buildings which made fire a highly destructive and often inevitable occurrence. However, the style also appeared in other circumstances, such as when small communities grew and matured and the capital required to replace older commercial buildings became available.

24-26 King Street East was constructed in this context. The property was purchased in 1868 by Isaac McNeely and it is believed that he constructed the subject property shortly after its purchase. This was around the time that the Italianate style was coming to prominence across Ontario and Omemeë was experiencing a rapid rise in prosperity and commercial growth with the arrival of the railway. It is not known what, if anything, was located on the property prior to the construction of the current structure although it passed through the hands of several of Omemeë's major landowners and businessmen, William Cottingham and Thomas Matchett, the latter of whom eventually sold the property to McNeely.

The current building is two storeys in height with a gable roof, with the gable ends on the west and east elevations of the building. The ground floor of the building originally included two separate commercial units joined on the

interior, although this has been modified into one larger space with a single recessed entrance where the eastern storefront was once located. The building also has a secondary entrance on the George Street South elevation of the building which leads to residential units; a two-storey extension of the building is located to the rear as a residential portion to the structure and has a flat roof. The inclusion of residential units such as this in downtown Omeme was very common in the late nineteenth century, generally to accommodate the owner of the shop, and can be seen in most of the other nineteenth century commercial properties in the downtown.

The building is executed in red brick and divided into two bay with pilasters on the front facing elevation. The west elevation facing on to George Street South is also divided into three narrower bays by pilasters, echoing the rhythm of the main façade. The building is relatively restrained in its decorative elements and has been since the time of construction; the storefront was originally much more ornate than it is in its current form and was the primary point of decorative embellishment on the structure. However, it still displays decorative elements typically of this architectural type including dog tooth coursing on both the front and side elevations of the commercial block, as well as on the residential addition, defined lintels and lugsills, and stone corbels.

The building's most unique feature is its flattened gable roof with eyebrow dormers. Most Italianate commercial buildings had flat roofs to maximize the flat front facing façade for decorative elements. A gable roof on a building of this style is not common and is more typical of Georgian and early Victorian commercial architecture from the first half of the nineteenth century which typically had gable roofs with dormers above two-storey facades, facilitating residential space above the storefront. This arrangement is not commonly seen in urban commercial architecture after 1860s and the subject property is a unique example of this.

Although the Italianate style was the most common architectural style for downtown commercial buildings in the second half of the nineteenth century, this building is unique as one of only three intact Italianate commercial buildings in downtown Omeme, and one of its oldest surviving commercial buildings. Omeme developed a robust and built up throughout the mid-nineteenth century, as can be seen in the 1881 fire insure plan, but the village suffered a series of three devastating fires in 1890, 1891 and 1892 that destroyed most of the buildings in the downtown core. There are five commercial buildings surviving in downtown Omeme that predate this fire, including the subject property. The others are 30-32 King Street East and 34-36 King Street East on the south side of King Street East between George and Colborne Streets and 25 and 45 King Street East on the north side of King Street East, east of George Street. 46 King Street, now the Legion, also predates the fire but was originally constructed as a substantial industrial

foundry, not as a commercial property. 30-32 King Street East and 45 King Street East are believed to be the oldest of this set of buildings, although their dates of construction are not known. As one of the survivors of this period, it provides insight into Omemee's downtown streetscape prior to 1890 at the height of its nineteenth century development.

Overall, the property is a unique example of Italianate commercial architecture in Omemee. It displays and has retained the key architectural features of this popular commercial style as executed in the second half of the nineteenth century, but is unique due to its uncommon gable roof with eyebrow dormers that are indicative of an earlier style of commercial architecture in Ontario downtowns. It is also important as one of only a small number of Italianate buildings and those pre-dating the significant fires of the early 1890s.

Historical and Associative Value

24-26 King Street has historical and associative value in its historic role as a commercial building and general store. Often identified as McNeely's General Store, it was constructed as a general store by Isaac McNeely around 1868 and operated by him until his death in 1892. McNeely's General Store grew to become a prominent and well-known business in Omemee and the surrounding area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and McNeely a well-known and community-minded businessman. It has direct historical relationships with the historic commercial and economic development in Omemee, being constructed during a period of rapid economic development between about 1860 and 1880, and in its role as a general store, it provides information regarding the economic growth of the community throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

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 Cottingshams 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; fifteenth 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

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.

The subject property was constructed around 1868 as a general store for local businessman and retailer, Isaac McNeely. McNeely appears to have arrived in Kawartha Lakes along with his immediate and extended family in the mid to late 1830s and settled in Ops Township; the exact date of arrival is not known, but Isaac's younger brother Thomas was born in Ontario in 1838. The group that arrived in Canada was significant. It included Isaac McNeely, his siblings and their parents Catherine Reid and John McNeely, along with at least four of Catherine's siblings with their families and Catherine's mother, also named Catherine, for whom there is a memorial plaque in the Emily Cemetery Chapel. The family does not appear to have come at the same time as Catherine's brother William and his wife, Margaret Elizabeth, are recorded as having arrived with their children in 1840. It is not known where they originally settled although Isaac McNeely's first cousin, Isaac Reid, purchased a farm in Reaboro in 1847 and John McNeely appears in the 1861 census in a stone house in Ops Township, so it likely they came to Ops Township around this time. The McNeely and Reid families remained well-established in both Ops and Emily Townships throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century and were prominent families in Omemee and Reaboro; for example, Isaac McNeely's

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

sister Jane married Omemee furniture maker John McCrae and is the mother to Flora McCrae, later Lady Eaton.

McNeely first appears in Emily Township in 1861 where he is listed, age 35, as a merchant. He was living in Omemee at this time which was, at the time, not a separate municipal entity from Emily Township. His business premises at this time are not known but he was recorded as working as a dry goods merchant as early as the 1865 directory where he has an advertisement for a business on King Street selling “Staple and Fancy Dry Good, Groceries, Boots and Shoes, Hardware, Dye Stuffs, Paints and Oils, Glass, Putty, Lamps &c., &c.”² and is one of only two Omemee businesses to advertise in the directory, although there were six general stores in the village that are listed in the directory. He was living with his younger brother, Thomas, and his maternal aunt Sarah Reid, who was only about ten years older than he was. He never married but lived with Sarah Reid for the rest of his life and they are buried together in the Emily Cemetery.

In 1868, he purchased the subject property from Thomas Matchett, a prominent Omemee businessman and landowner and is believed to have constructed in the extant building shortly thereafter. The new store, which when originally built had two separate storefronts, was divided into two sections connected by several doorways on the interior. The western section was dedicated to dry goods and some groceries, while the eastern section included hardware, paints, boots, and shoes. It was a significant business in downtown Omemee and, as a general store, vital to the commercial and everyday life of the community, operating until McNeely's deaths in 1869.

The general store was a vital commercial institution in nineteenth century, particularly in small towns and rural areas where there were fewer specialized retailers. General stores were central aspects of community life in nineteenth century Ontario as the primary retail source for rural and small town 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 rural areas, or in communities such as Omemee that served large rural population as the local village, 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

² Fuller's Counties of Peterborough and Victoria Directory for 1865 and 1866 (Toronto: Blackburn's City Steam Press, 1866), 96.

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. However, when a general store was established in a community, it meant that long distance 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. This is what occurred in Omemee where the first retail establishment was a general store. 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 like Omemee often ended up with more than one store of this type, as a growing population led to an increased demand for products.

General stores, as reflected in their name, sold a wide array of products. When looking at data related to general store sales in the nineteenth century, 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. Basic, every-day products, like cotton and nails, were general store staples that were mass manufactured by the middle of the nineteenth century; although the rise of mail-order catalogues by the turn of the century allowed rural and small-town consumers to purchase and order a much greater range of products than at their local general store, visiting the store was often easier and cheaper and the general store continued to be an important supplier of non-grocery products into the early twentieth century. The other major product sold by general stores was flour. Although many early settlers attempted to various degrees to grow their own grain, by the middle of the century, 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. For both rural and small town residents, the general store was the location where flour, alongside other dry food items, was purchased.

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.

McNeely was certainly a prominent figure in the community. His business was an important and large one in Omemeë but he also was a key member of the broader community. This is most clearly reflected in his obituary in May 1892:

It is our painful duty to record the death of Mr. Isaac McNeely, which took place at his residence in this village last Friday night. He had been in poor health for the past year, but was still able to look after his mercantile business until about three months ago, since which time he has been confined to his room and despite the best efforts of his medical attendants he gradually sank and death terminated his sufferings as above stated. The deceased was one of the pioneer residents, having been engaged in general merchandise in the village for over thirty-five years. He built up an excellent trade and his straight-forward business tactics and honourable dealing secured him the confidence of the best element of the community. His word was as good as his bond, and his wise and conservative counsel was always freely given to those of limited experience in various business matters. He has frequently branched out into other enterprises, having a few years ago associated himself with Mr. Henry Walters of Lindsay, and the firm was successful as contractors for railroad bridges and other public works. He was a member of the school board for several years, was an active worker in the English church, having occupied the position of warden for many years and was identified with every laudable enterprise.³

McNeely was also identified as a regular giver to various charitable causes, and a member of the local Masonic lodge. Little else is known about his personal life besides his extensive community involvement but it was clearly an

³ Quoted in *Omemeë*, 40.

important member of the late nineteenth century community who was well-known, extensively involved and well-respected in Omemee throughout his life in the village.

When viewed its relation to its mid-nineteenth century context, its role as a general store and McNeely's prominence, the subject property has significant historical value within the context of Omemee's commercial development from the mid-nineteenth century. Operating as a general store throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the store reflected Omemee's growing economy and evolving downtown commercial area in the 1860s and its growth as a commercial centre for the surrounding rural area. In particular, its operation as McNeely's General Store was well known in the local community and outlines its importance as part of Omemee's historic commercial area.

Contextual Value

24-26 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintain and support the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. While the majority of the commercial buildings in downtown Omemee predate 1900, it forms one of a small collection of commercial buildings that pre-date the early 1890s when several significant fires destroyed most of the downtown core and which are primarily located at the eastern end of the downtown. It is physically, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the village's downtown streetscape.

The subject property was constructed around 1868 as part of the commercial development of Omemee in the 1860s and 1870s as the community grew in size and prosperity after the arrival of the railway in 1857. At this time, King Street East became firmly established as the village's downtown core with new commercial buildings in up-to-date Victorian styles. The community reached the height of its nineteenth century prosperity and population in 1878 and the 1881 Fire Insurance Plan shows its physical development at that time.

Downtown Omemee, in 1881, included a range of two- and three-storey commercial properties in both brick and wood built to the front lot line. Some of these are attached to each other in a continuous streetwall, but many are detached from each other and sometimes punctuated with residential properties, as is the case in the block on which the subject property is located. While this is atypical in larger centres, such as Lindsay where most commercial buildings from this period were constructed as a continuous streetwall, it was relatively common in smaller centres where space in downtown areas was at less of a premium.

In the early 1890s, Omemee's downtown streetscape was altered dramatically when three major fires, in 1890, 1891 and 1892, destroyed most of the buildings

in the downtown core. There are five commercial buildings surviving in downtown Omeme that predate this fire, including the subject property, which taken together form a historic and thematic unit. The others are 30-32 King Street East and 34-36 King Street East on the south side of King Street East between George and Colborne Streets and 25 and 45 King Street East on the north side of King Street East, east of George Street. 46 King Street, now the Legion, also predates the fire but was originally constructed as a substantial industrial foundry, not as a commercial property; it does, however, contribute to the pre-1890 collection of properties in this area. All of these buildings are to the east of George Street and are located in close proximity to one another on the eastern side of the downtown core. 30-32 King Street East and 45 King Street East are believed to be the oldest of this set of buildings, although their dates of construction are not known. These properties have a specific contextual relationship to one another by virtue of their age and shared history, alongside their role within the broader streetscape.

By the 1904 Fire Insurance Plan, the downtown core had largely been rebuilt with new commercial buildings and the streetscape had evolved to more closely reflect its current context. The properties that were destroyed during the fire were largely rebuilt in the early 1890s and are mostly still extant; these can be seen alongside both the subject property and the others that pre-date the early 1890s fires both in the Plan and the streetscape itself. Omeme'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 includes structures that were both built before and after the fires of the early 1890s and retains its historic patterns, including brick and frame buildings that are two- to three-storeys and built to the front lot line with a combination of detached and attached structures. 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 Omeme. 34-36 King Street East supports and maintains this historic small town streetscape as part of this collection of buildings. As with most Victorian buildings, it is built to the sidewalk and forms part of a cohesive, although not continuous, 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, constitute the Reasons for Designation required under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

Design and Physical Value

24-26 King Street has design and physical value as a unique example of a Victorian commercial building in Omemee and one of the oldest extant commercial buildings in the village. Constructed around 1868, it is primarily constructed in the Italianate commercial style, the most popular style for downtown commercial architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century but includes a unique gable roof with eyebrow dormers, an atypical feature for Italianate commercial architecture. Key architectural features from the Italianate style include its two-storey red brick construction, decorative brick coursing and division of the façade into bays by pilasters. It is one of only five downtown commercial buildings in Omemee that predate 1890.

Historical and Associative Value

24-26 King Street has historical and associative value in its historic role as a commercial building and general store. Often identified as McNeely's General Store, it was constructed as a general store by Isaac McNeely around 1868 and operated by him until his death in 1892. McNeely's General Store grew to become a prominent and well-known business in Omemee and the surrounding area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and McNeely a well-known and community-minded businessman. It has direct historical relationships with the historic commercial and economic development in Omemee, being constructed during a period of rapid economic development between about 1860 and 1880, and in its role as a general store, it provides information regarding the economic growth of the community throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Contextual Value

24-26 King Street East has contextual value as part of the historic streetscape of downtown Omemee. It helps maintain and support the character of the commercial core of downtown Omemee as one of a range of nineteenth century commercial buildings extant along King Street East. While the majority of the commercial buildings in downtown Omemee predate 1900, it forms one of a small collection of commercial buildings that pre-date the early 1890s when several significant fires destroyed most of the downtown core and which are primarily located at the eastern end of the downtown. 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 the value of the property as a unique example of a Victorian commercial property in Omemee.

- Two-and-a-half storey red brick construction
- Flattened gable roof
- Eyebrow dormers
- Two-bay front elevation
- Three-bay side elevation
- Pilasters
- Dog-tooth coursing
- Stone corbels
- Fenestration including:
 - Rectangular upper storey windows
 - Rounded gable window
- Ground floor storefront including:
 - Picture windows
 - Recessed entrance
- Rear two-storey residential unit including:
 - Separate entrance
 - Fenestration
 - Flat roof
 - Entrance surround with overhang and brackets

Historical and Associative Attributes

The historical and associative attributes of the property support its value in its association with the nineteenth century development of Omemee and its role in the community as McNeely's General Store from the mid-nineteenth century.

- Association with the nineteenth century commercial development of Omemee
- Historic use as a general store
- Associations with Isaac McNeely

Contextual Attributes

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

- Orientation towards King Street East
- Construction to the north lot line
- Views of the property along King Street East and George Street South
- Views of King Street East and George Street South to the property
- Relationship to, 25 King Street East, 30-32 King Street East, 34-36 King Street East, 45 King Street East and 46 King Street East

Images



Downtown Omeme, c. 1906







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