

2 King Street West, Village of Omemee (John McCrea Memorial Parsonage)

Heritage Designation Evaluation

Omemee

LT 1 S/S KING ST AND W/S STURGEON ST PL 109 & PT LT 2 S/S KING ST AND W/S STURGEON ST PL 109 BEING PART 1 PL 57R10537
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 2 King Street West 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 an Arts and Craft style residence in Omemee. The house was constructed in 1910 and displays key characteristics of the Arts and Crafts style, including its asymmetrical massing, simplified design elements and plentiful windows. It is one of the largest and earliest examples of this architectural style in Omemee.

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

The property displays a typical degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit 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 prominent Omemee businessman and Methodist lay leader, John McCrea and his daughter, Flora McCrea, Lady Eaton. The house was built by Lady Eaton as a parsonage for the local Methodist Church in memory of her father who was a central lay figure in the local church and an important citizen of nineteenth century Omemee.

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 history of the Methodist Church in Omemee, as its former parsonage.

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

The designer or builder of the house is not definitively known.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

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

The property is important in supporting the historic small-town character of King Street in Omemee. King Street includes both the commercial buildings of the village's downtown as well as a collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century residences of various sizes and styles. The property, built in 1910 in the Arts and Crafts style, supports this varied historic residential landscape.

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

The property is historically, functionally and visually linked to the adjacent Trinity United Church. The subject property was constructed as a parsonage for the church when it was a Methodist church prior to the creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925 and served in that capacity throughout the twentieth century, although it is now a private residence. It is also historically connected to Coronation Hall, located across the road, through both structures' historic connection to the Eatons.

iii. is a landmark.

The property is a longstanding local landmark as the parsonage for the Methodist and later United Church. It is located on the southwest corner of Omemee's main intersection of King and Sturgeon Streets and is a prominent and well-known building in the village.

Design and Physical Value

2 King Street West has design and physical value as a unique, early and large, example of an Arts and Crafts style house in Omemee. Constructed in 1910, the property displays key characteristics of this popular early twentieth century architectural style. These characteristics include its asymmetrical massing, simplified design elements and plentiful windows which were typical of this style which sought a more naturalistic and less ornate style of architecture compared to its Victorian predecessors. It is the largest and most prominent examples of this architectural style in Omemee, where the Arts and Crafts style was primarily used in smaller, more modest Craftsman bungalows throughout the 1910s and 1920s. The house was originally constructed as a parsonage for the adjacent Methodist, now United, church and is known locally as the John McCrea Memorial Parsonage, having been built in memory of John McCrea, a prominent Methodist lay leader and Omemee businessman.

The Arts and Crafts movement emerged in Britain in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Thinkers at this time, including prominent critics and theorists A.W.N. Pugin and John Ruskin, criticized Victorian craft and design for its use of industrial materials and methods and bristled at the increasing industrialization of British life. Of concern to them was the eroding of craftsmanship, skill and quality in the traditional arts, including textiles, wallpapers, furniture, stained glass, and interior design as well as architecture. Advocates saw mass production through factories and mechanization as eroding the quality and authenticity of British design and the skills and value of the craftsman; tied into their concerns around quality were also concerns around the treatment and conditions of the worker in the factory and many of the Arts and Crafts thinkers were also involved in reform movements and socialism. Through their theories and their work, the Arts and Crafts thinkers and designers advocated for a return to traditional craftsmanship, authentic modes of production and design and a rustic and often medieval aesthetic, all of which were seen as imbuing moral virtue and human dignity. Central to this movement, and its main late nineteenth century influence, was William Morris, the London-born textile artist and poet, one of the most well-known interior decorators of the late nineteenth century and a proponent of traditional British textile craft.

The Arts and Crafts movement, both in British and its later North American iterations, was effectively an anti-modernist movement based in aesthetics and modes of production and craftsmanship. Pushing back on the industrialization of European and North American life, the focus on traditional craft, simplicity of form and natural materials spoke to broader concerns regarding the encroachment of technology and industrial production on traditional means of creation and, in many aspects, traditional skills and ways of life. This anti-modernism in architecture and design was part of a broader cultural trend

during this period that reacted to the social upheavals and cultural changes brought about by increasing urbanization; with more and more families moving to cities, either from their rural hinterlands, or in the case of North American cities, from Britain and Europe, there was an overwhelming feeling that traditional social and familial ties between people and their communities were being fractured, resulting in both personal and societal upheaval. The rise of an anti-modernist position sought to push back on these significant societal changes that were occurring, reasserting the place of traditional, moral and authentic ways of living in the midst of the modern world. It should be noted that this preoccupation and anxiety over the moral and societal ills of late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernization were not equally felt across social classes, as most of those with antimodernist sympathies were from the middle and upper classes of urban society, people with time on their hands to fret about the ills of industrialization and its impact on tradition, personal morals and labour.

Although many of the early figures in the Arts and Crafts movement were primarily concerned with decorative arts, such as textiles and furniture, the movement had a profound and lasting influence on architecture. Architecturally, the movement pushed back on the revivalist and often ornate architectural styles of the Victorian period, including the Gothic Revival, Neoclassical and Queen Anne styles that were popular in domestic architecture from 1850 to the end of the century; although the Arts and Crafts style was used across different architectural types, including a number of notable early twentieth century churches, it found its most comfortable location in the built environment in domestic spaces. Despite these styles' roots in historical architectural precedent, proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement saw them as too fussy, with ornate elements that did not reflect authenticity or the function natural of the building. That many of the decorative elements used in later nineteenth century houses, particularly those constructed in the highly ornate Queen Anne style, were mass manufactured further distanced architects and builders who worked in the Arts and Crafts style from their domestic predecessors.

Morris aptly summarized the Arts and Crafts approach to architecture at an 1890 lecture, he stated:

If the old cottages, barns and the like are kept in good repair from year to year, they will not need to be pulled down to give place either to red brick, blue slated man-sty, or the modern Tudor lord-bountiful cottage. And where...new buildings must be built, by building them well and in a common sense and unpretentious way, with the good material of the countryside, they will take their place

alongside the old houses and look, like them, a real growth of the soil.¹

Morris believed that “it will be from such necessary unpretentious buildings that the new and genuine architecture will spring, rather than our experiments in conscious style.”² In alignment with Morris’ pronouncements, the primary source for Arts and Crafts architects was vernacular English architecture, including cottages and barns, which were seen to evolve organically in their landscapes and use natural local materials in an unselfconscious manner. In these structures, Morris and his contemporaries saw an architecture of authentic craftsmanship and a harmonious connection between place and building. The quintessential Arts and Crafts home was indeed Morris’ own, constructed in 1860 to the design of his contemporary Philip Webb in Bexleyheath. Known as the Red House, the house was built in red brick and exemplified the ideas espoused by the movement: it was earthy and vernacular in its use of red brick and heavy massing that integrated itself into the surrounding countryside while its asymmetrical and rambling layout with irregular rooflines, large number of differing windows and chimneys suggesting a natural progression of development. The style quickly spread in England particularly, popular for its picturesque and homey qualities. While many of the most notable examples were constructed as large country homes for wealthy patrons, the style also made its way into more modest dwellings in towns, reaching its height in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In Canada, the Arts and Crafts architecture was quickly and readily adopted in the country’s growing urban centres. The style came to prominence just at the time of the suburban expansion of Canadian cities and the creation of the first streetcar suburbs where middle- and upper-class urban dwellers flocked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for large houses and broad lawns away from the noise and dirt of central urban locations. The large-scale construction of new houses during this period allowed the Arts and Crafts style to reach its prominence in Canada between approximately 1890 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914 and led to the creation of a range of unique Arts and Crafts houses, primarily in Canada’s urban areas during this period as architects took advantage of large lots to create unique houses in the newly popular style. Most well-known of its proponents in Canada was British-born architect Eden Smith who moved to Toronto in 1885 and designed, over the next several decades, huge numbers of Arts and Crafts houses in the city, although he occasionally designed houses elsewhere, including two cottages in Sturgeon Point in 1908. Smith’s houses came to

¹ William Morris, “On the External Coverings of Roofs,” 1890 in *The Collected Works of William Morris, vol 22: Hopes and Fears for Art; Lectures on Art and Industry*, ed. May Morris (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1910), 408.

² Morris, “Address to Birmingham Art Students,” 1894 in *The Collected Works of William Morris, vol 22*, 429.

epitomize the Arts and Crafts movement in Canada with naturalistic and asymmetrical massing, a heavy use of brick, free-flowing interiors, and an aesthetic connection to vernacular English architecture.

Throughout this time period, the Arts and Crafts style became, in many ways, a nationalist mode of cultural expression. Although an English style in origins, the style came to prominence at the same time as Canada was building its own identity as a young nation and the style became associated with the country's cultural coming of age. It shaped the architecture of growing cities and towns, had profound influence on interior design and domestic life, and influenced artistic expression through movements such as the Group of Seven that came to define a Canadian national spirit in the early decades of the twentieth century. It also spoke to antimodernist tendencies prevalent in Canadian thought around this time, particularly around the romanticism of the past and of nature through its alleged roots in vernacular design and the imagined past. It was also intrinsically linked to the wealthy Anglo-Canadian elite – including the Eaton's family who financed this building – who promoted its use as part of the nation and identity building project.

In Canada, the style developed to emphasize a number of key architectural features that were also present in British and American iterations of the style. Canadian examples were generally constructed in brick, usually red but sometimes buff, although stuccoed examples also exist, as rendering was a popular external cladding English examples. The houses tended to be asymmetrical, although, as many were constructed in urban and suburban contexts, tended to be less rambling than their English counterparts, using elements such as off-centre entrances, dipping gables, irregularly placed casement sash and casement windows, multiple chimneys, to create the naturalistic and vernacular aesthetic craved in the Arts and Crafts style. Natural materials, including stone and wood, were also emphasized and ornamental features were generally limited, with the occasional use of plain and heavy beams, half timbering, and structural brick designs. The emphasis of these homes was on high quality craftsmanship, natural materials and colours and authentic modes of expression, in sharp contrast to the highly decorative styles of the late Victorian era.

Although the Arts and Crafts style ostensibly had a philosophical background rooted in social reform, the architectural style, in Canada as elsewhere, was primarily used in the large homes of the middle- and upper-classes who had the financial resources to pay for unique architect designed buildings. As a result, most Arts and Crafts style houses in Canada, as well as in Britain and the United States, are large and were aimed at a specific clientele with money, particularly those which were architect designed. There are notable exceptions to this, such as the Riverdale Courts, later Bain Co-op, designed by Eden Smith and an early low-income housing project in Toronto, but these were rare

throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Arts and Crafts movement also democratized in the post-World War One era with the introduction of the Craftsman bungalow, a relatively standardized one or one-and-a-half storey housing type popular in the late 1910s and 1920s with working and lower middle-class families that drew from the Arts and Crafts tradition.

2 King Street East was constructed in 1910, during the height of the Arts and Crafts' popularity in Canada. The erection of a large Arts and Crafts house in a town the size of Omemee, which had a population of 505 people in the 1911 census, was not a common sight; most large homes of this type were erected in the prosperous suburban areas growing up in major centres around this period, not in small villages located in primarily agricultural areas. Other Arts and Crafts homes were constructed in Omemee throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, but these were mostly modest Craftsman bungalows popular in the 1910s and 1920s, inspired by the Arts and Crafts style but constructed on a much smaller scale and drawing heavily on patterns from books and catalogues. In this way, the house is very unique and its size and style are likely a reflection of its origins as a donation from the Eaton family to the Methodist Church in Omemee where the wealth of the Eatons and their role as benefactors for the hometown of Lady Eaton were on show in the buildings they paid for in the village, including Coronation Hall and the Emily Cemetery Chapel, which reflect a scale and urban architectural taste not necessarily reflected elsewhere in Omemee's early twentieth century architectural landscape. The house was constructed in memory of John McCrea, a local businessman and prominent Methodist lay leader and Lady Eaton's father.

The designer of this house is not known, and was not reported on in the article on the opening of the parsonage that appeared in the *Watchman-Warder* on November 3, 1910 when the house was complete and the keys and deed handed over to the Methodist Church by John Craig and Flora Eaton. It is highly likely that it was designed by a Toronto firm, given the family's residence in the city and connection to the Toronto arts and cultural community. It is known that many of the construction crew came from Toronto, although some Omemee men were also involved in the erection of the structure. Little is known about its design origins or inspiration, save its basis in the prevailing Arts and Crafts style.

The exterior of the house and its adherence to the Arts and Crafts style is based in its asymmetrical and irregular massing, natural brick exterior, large number of windows and overall naturalistic aesthetic favoured by the movement. The house is two-and-a-half storeys in height and executed in buff brick. Its primary façade actually faces away from both Sturgeon and King Streets, towards what is now Trinity United Church. At the time of its

construction, it was built as the parsonage for this church, then a Methodist Church, and faced towards it to form cohesive church grounds and a focus of the building on the church it served.

The massing of the house is decidedly asymmetrical, leading the vernacular and natural aesthetic preferred by proponents of the Arts and Crafts style. The front façade of the building features a central, although still asymmetrical entrance sunporch – a common feature at this time – flanked by two two-storey bays, which are different from one another. The northern bay is rounded, with bay windows on both the first and second storey, while the southern bay is a classic projecting bay with gable and a bell-roof supported by solid, yet plain brackets, evoking vernacular English design. The other three elevations of the house are also decidedly asymmetrical, featuring various projections, chimneys of different sizes, and a corner porch on the northeast corner of the building.

The house has few ornate architectural features, typical of many Arts and Crafts buildings as designers sought authenticity and a break from the ornate styles of the past. Exceptions to this lack of ornamentation include dog tooth brick and concrete coursing on the front elevation of the building, wide eaves, brackets and the multiple windows, including sash, multi-pane and coloured glass, which provide visual interest and enhance the overall asymmetrical and naturalistic aesthetic of the structure. The house is also notable for its prominently displayed rough stone foundation, a nod to the preference of the Arts and Crafts movement for natural materials, even as concrete was beginning to take over as the preferred material for foundations in urban areas and towns during the early decades of the twentieth century. The house has minimal exterior changes since it was originally constructed, although the gable ends of the house, which were originally stuccoed, have been covered in vertical siding. Additional features, including the date stone laid by a young Timothy Craig Eaton, aged, 7, and a plaque reading “John McCrea Memorial Methodist Parsonage, Omeme, Ontario, 1910” have also been retained.

When the house was completed and opened in November 1910, it was widely praised in the community for its handsome architecture. The building opened on November 2, 1910 and, as part of the opening and hand over to the Methodist church, tours were given of the building and grounds, with speeches given and refreshments served; fifteen cents was charged for tours “in order to keep a large crowd from entering the new building.”³ The opening was reported on in the *Watchman-Warder* the following day in an article that was full of praise for the structure. The newspaper’s account provided a description of the “beautifully furnished”⁴ interior and noted it had been fully decorated

³ “John McCrea Memorial Parsonage Opened,” *Watchman-Warder*, November 3, 1910, 7.

⁴ “Parsonage Opened,” 7.

and was lighted by gas and electric lights. After reporting on the speeches and remarks, the newspaper concluded:

The Omemee citizens are to be congratulated in having such a true friend as Mr. Eaton has proven himself to be. It is doubtful if any church outside the large cities can boast of a parsonage so comfortably built and furnished as the one presented to the trustees in Omemee yesterday.⁵

The subject property remains an important architectural landmark in Omemee, distinct in its architecture as a unique example of Arts and Crafts style in the village. Constructed at a time when the Arts and Crafts style was at its height, the house was erected in the fashion of prominent and prosperous urban and suburban homes of the period, using features typical of its time and style. It is the only home like it in Omemee, and reflects the specific aesthetic considerations of the Arts and Crafts style.

Historical and Associative Value

2 King Street West has historical and associative value as the former parsonage for the Omemee Methodist Church, now Trinity United Church, and in its association with local businessman and Methodist lay leader John McCrea and his daughter Flora McCrea Eaton, later known as Lady Eaton. Flora Eaton had this house built in 1910 in memory of her father, a prominent lay leader in the Methodist Church in Omemee and a respected local citizen and businessman who had died the previous year in 1909. The property yields information regarding McCrea's role in late nineteenth century Omemee as well as the role of the Methodist church in the community at this time when it was a prominent and important local institution.

John McCrea was born in Ireland in 1832 to John McCrae (1778-1847) and Rebecca Harper (1795-1847), one of a large family of ten children, of whom one, an older brother also named John, died in childhood. The family lived in Clonaweel, County Fermanagh near what was then the thriving market town of Pettigo. Little is known about their living situation although the highly rural nature of Clonaweel suggests they were likely farmers. However, by 1847, they had arrived in Canada as part of a wave of Irish immigration to Canada in the wake of the Great Famine. The Great Famine, also known as the Irish potato famine, was a period of starvation and social upheaval in Ireland lasting from approximately 1845 to 1852 that profoundly impacted both Ireland and English-speaking locations across the globe. The central cause of the famine was a potato blight which severely impacted potato crops across Ireland; the potato, at the time, was the primary food source of the majority of people in the country, particularly in rural areas where tenant farmers subsisted on them.

⁵ "Parsonage Opened," 7.

As a result, widespread starvation swept across Ireland with the poorest and more rural areas the most impacted. At the same time, the economic situation of Ireland was poor and the British government doing little to alleviate the challenges faced by tenant farmers, massively exacerbating a significant crop failure. During this period, around 1 million people died and 1 million more left the country, primarily to Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and the population of Ireland dropped around 25%.

Around 25% of County Fermanagh's residents died or left the county between 1841 and 1851, although it is not clear as to what portion of this population emigrated. Rural areas, such as Clonaweel, where the worst affected where the population relied more highly on the potato and had fewer sources of income. The McCreas were part of the emigration from the county, during this period, leaving Ireland for Canada in 1847, the worst year of the famine, along with around 100,000 other people from Ireland who arrived in Canada in 1847 alone.

The McCreas boarded the J.&J. Cooke Company ship, the *Leander*, at Derry on May 7, 1847 and sailed to Quebec, arriving on June 12 of that year with around 400 other emigrants, a significant number of whom were from the Pettigo area. Not all of the McCreas travelled: both parents, John and Rebecca, boarded the ship along with their six youngest children, George (22), Anne (19), Ellen (17), John (15), Fanny (12) and William (10). Two of their three surviving oldest children, Elizabeth (28) and Edward (23) stayed in Ireland, while their eldest Robert (30) also emigrated to Canada at some point separately from his parents in the 1840s with his wife Ann and daughter Elizabeth and settled in Bowmanville.

The McCreas arrived in Quebec and travelled soon after to Montreal. By early September, both parents were dead: Rebecca died on August 23 and the elder John on September 5, from an unknown fever contracted on the voyage. Both were buried there and recorded in the St. James Methodist Church register. From this point, it is unknown as to what happened to their children.

By the late 1850s, the younger John had arrived in Omemee without any of his other siblings. His date of arrival is not known but, on August 7, 1859, he married local settler Jane McNeely, born in Ireland in 1833. McNeely had arrived in Ontario with her extended family in 1837, as recorded in the 1901 census, where they settled in Emily Township where her younger brother Thomas was born in 1838. The McNeely group that arrived in Canada was significant. It included Jane McNeely, age 5, her eight siblings (Abraham (15), Isaac (14), Sarah (13), David (11), Margaret (9), John (7), William (3) and Catherine, an infant) 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. Catherine's brother William Reid and his wife, Margaret Elizabeth followed and are recorded as having arriving in Ops with their children in 1840. It is not known where they originally settled although Jane'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 is likely that the entire kinship group settled in this area. 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, Jane McNeely's brother Isaac was a prominent Omemee merchant throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Like John, Jane, whose family had come from Donegal and then Barnhill near Enniskillen, was Irish and Protestant, reflecting the prevailing demographics in southern Emily Township throughout the nineteenth century which was primarily settled, beginning in the 1820s and continuing throughout the century, by Anglican and Methodist families from the north of Ireland. The pattern of cohesive ethno-cultural settlement was the norm in nineteenth century Ontario and can even be seen within Emily Township itself which was largely segregated based on religion with Irish Protestants in the south and Irish Catholics in the north. It is also highly possible that their families knew each other before they emigrated. Both families came from the same area of Ireland and Jane's uncle William Reid, who settled in Ops in the early 1840s, owned a farm in Tullylark, less than five miles as the crow flies from Clonaweel and a community that was also served by the market town at Pettigo. The McNeelys were also devout Methodists; John McNeely was president of the Emily Bible Society in the 1850s and had also served as a lay leader back in Ireland in the area where the McCreas also lived. If John had known the McNeelys and Reids, it makes sense that he would travel to the small village of Omemee, a place to which he had no other connection, by himself to establish a life there.

In Omemee, McCrea opened a successful furniture and cabinetry business on King Street, also serving as a coffin maker and undertaker, as was often the case in early Ontario communities, where the furniture and burial businesses often overlapped. McCrea was known for the wide array and high quality of furniture pieces he made for the houses of many people in Omemee and the business was well-regarded, successful and respected in the community. As factory made furniture became more common in the later decades of the nineteenth century, McCrea also sold factory-made pieces alongside custom work and coffins.

The McCreas first lived in a small house to the west of Sturgeon Street before moving to a larger brick residence to the east of Sturgeon Street; this house is still extant at 5 King Street East. It was named Tully Lark in honour of Jane McNeely's family's home in Ireland. Here, John and Jane grew their family to

include eight children born between 1859 and 1879: Amy, Harper, Ellen, John, Anna, William, Arthur and Sarah, also known as Flora. Several of the children, notably Amy who married local druggist, and later Reeve, Robert Mulligan, John who took over his father's business and became a prolific maker of intricate models of pioneer life, were well known and respected locally as they grew into adulthood. The most recognizable of the children, however, was Flora who, in 1901, married the son of Timothy Eaton and eventual heir to the Eaton's empire, John Craig Eaton, and became one of Canada's leading socialites and philanthropists of the early twentieth century.

Flora McCrea Eaton's autobiography presents a warm and happy picture of her family and parents. The family was large, very close, and very religious. Despite their rural and immigrant background, both John McCrea and Jane McNeely were well-read and intelligent, as well as musical, a trait they passed onto many of their children. Of her parents in the community, Eaton wrote:

Both our parents shared actively in the affairs of church and community. Father served in almost every capacity in the village Council except as Reeve – a post which he did not want. He was often sent as a representative to County meetings, was for years a member of the School Board, and a Trustee of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Every Sunday he conducted the young men's Bible Class, and as a voluntary lay speaker or preacher was frequently away, morning or evening, to take the service in one of the churches in the county district. Mother was a member of the Ladies' Aid and the Women's Missionary Society, of which she was made a life member of the organization. During the Boer War she helped to gather together a group of Omemeé women who knitted and contributed comforts for the men who had joined up and left for South Africa. She was a studious person who always found a practice means of giving expression to her sympathies.⁶

The Methodist Church was at the centre of life for the McCrea family and they were important contributors to the church community. The first Methodist services had been held in Omemeé as early as the 1820s; these services are believed to have been held in Samuel Cottingham's store, although earlier services had been held in the homes in rural Emily as some of the earliest settlers desired to build the local congregation which, at the time, was part of the Port Hope Methodist circuit.

⁶ Flora McCrea Eaton, *Memory's Wall: The Autobiography of Flora McCrea Eaton* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Limited, 1956), 4.

The first Methodist Church was constructed in Omemee beginning in 1836 and it is believed to have officially opened in 1840, on the current site of Trinity United Church, its successor. This is the church that was in use when McCrea arrived in Omemee and he and his family would have worshiped in this building until it was reconstructed in 1876. The Methodist population in Omemee was relatively large and very active, participating in mission and charity work, and the congregation supplying a large number of ministers to the Methodist and later United Churches and missionaries abroad. It was also a prominent institution in the community with a large congregation and an active interest in local activities.

At this time, the Methodist Church relied heavily on lay people to do significant amounts of labour, despite the fact that, by the second half of the nineteenth century, Omemee had a dedicated minister. It was, however, at the centre of a very large circuit and functions were also required at the church in the village. Lay leaders like McCrea undertook these roles, including teaching Sunday School, leading Bible classes and leading various church events, both Christian and social. The Church also required lay leaders to preach at other churches in the circuit, something that McCrea did regularly. At this time, and before ministers were able to drive between rural churches to conduct multiple services on a Sunday, devout and reliable laymen were trained and licensed by the Official Board of the Circuit to tend to the rural churches. The Omemee circuit was very large and covered most of southern Emily Township and into Ops Township. It included charges at Salem, the Third Line, Bethel, Ops, Lebanon, Mount Horeb and Orange Corners, requiring a team of dedicated lay leaders to tend to each Methodist class. McCrea was a consistent presence in the Omemee circuit and well-known and respected by local Methodists as a lay leader in both the village and surrounding rural area.

McCrea died on November 27, 1909 in Omemee and was survived by his wife and seven of his eight children. The following year, his youngest daughter, Flora McCrea Eaton, and her husband John Craig Eaton, decided to erect a new parsonage – the subject property – for the Methodist Church in Omemee in his honour and in recognition of the importance of the church in his life and his service to it. The older parsonage, located nearby, had been constructed in 1853 and used consistently from that time, but it was decided that a new, larger and more modern parsonage would be an appropriate tribute to the late lay leader.

The donation of the new parsonage was not the first involvement of the Eatons in Omemee, as Flora McCrea Eaton – who would become Lady Eaton in 1915 when her husband was knighted – was a well-known Canadian philanthropist throughout the first half of the twentieth century and that philanthropy extended to her home town. Flora met the Eaton heir while she was studying nursing in Toronto, where he was a patient at the hospital in

which she was working, and the pair were quickly engaged. They were married on May 8, 1901 in the Methodist Church in Omemee, an event the *Omeme Mirror* called “one of the greatest events in the history of Omemee.”⁷ Although from different financial backgrounds – while the McCreas were a comfortable family who owned a successful local business, the Eatons were extremely wealthy and one of Canada’s leading business families – both John and Flora were from the same cultural background. Both of their fathers, younger sons of tenant farmers born just two years apart, had emigrated from the north of Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century and had established themselves in business in Canada. Both of their families were also deeply religious and active in the Methodist Church; although Timothy Eaton was raised a Presbyterian, he quickly converted to Methodism after his arrival in Canada. Methodism was a driving force in both their business practices and their social and philanthropic activities as both John McCrea and Timothy Eaton were active lay leaders in their respective churches and promoters of Methodism and its moral certainties in their communities.

The adherence to Methodism continued in the young couple who used their considerable and growing wealth to finance a range of philanthropic giving, much of it aimed at Methodist and other Christian causes. Flora Eaton wrote in her autobiography that the “[c]hurch was an essential part of life”⁸ and it certainly informed their approach to charity and business. This included donations to Toronto General Hospital and the YMCA, as well as to the war effort during the First World War, as well as large donations to Victoria College, the University of Toronto’s Methodist college, and the donation of the lands and funds to build the Timothy Eaton Memorial Church on St. Clair Avenue as a memorial to the late businessman between 1912 and 1914. Although much of their life was in Toronto, and Flora McCrea Eaton never returned to live in her hometown, Omemee remained close to the couple’s heart and the village was the recipient of four large donations: the organ at the Methodist Church given in celebration of John McCrea and Jane McNeely’s fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1907, the new Methodist parsonage in 1910, the new municipal building and concert hall – Coronation Hall – in 1911, and the McCrea Memorial Chapel at the Emily Cemetery in 1929. The Eatons were relatively frequent visitors to Omemee and took an active interest in local matters; for example, Flora Eaton was made patron of the 109th Regiment, headquartered in Lindsay, during the First World War. Her continuing influence on the village throughout her life was well-recognized both during and after her life, including the naming of a local school in her honour.

The donation of the new Methodist parsonage to the village by the Eatons was a major event in Omemee and it was reported on in the *Watchman-Warder*

⁷ “McCrea-Eaton Nuptials,” *Omeme Mirror*, May 9, 1901, 2.

⁸ McCrea Eaton, *Memory’s Wall*, 59.

out of Lindsay on its opening in November 1910. Construction had commenced earlier in the year and the cornerstone had been laid by a young Timothy Craig Eaton, age 7, on May 10 of that year. The donation included the house, as well as its furnishings and the grounds. Tickets were sold for fifteen cents for a tour of the building with refreshments and speeches following. An address was composed by the church trustees which praised the couple's generosity and the importance of the new building for the village. The address stated:

The event of to-day awakens in our memory the recollection that a few years ago you kindly commemorated the golden wedding of Mr. and Mrs. John McCrea by installing in our church a magnificent pipe organ, and now you continue your benefaction by providing the church with a modern and comfortable home for the pastor and his successors. It is with mingled feelings of thankfulness and sorrow that we meet on the occasion of the presentation by you, of this handsome parsonage, with its elegant furnishings and beautiful grounds. Thankfulness in the acceptance of the gift, sorrow that he, to whose memory it is erected, is no longer one in our midst. You have taken such a deep interest in our home church in so many ways, that words cannot express our high appreciation and gratitude. This magnificent present is not only a valuable asset to the church property but also to the village and its citizens may justly feel proud of the same. We hope and pray that the blessings of our heavenly Father may rest on your efforts, and that long life and spiritual prosperity may be granted you and your family. May grace, mercy and peace abide within this house.⁹

With its construction, the house became a key fixture of the Methodist, and later United, Church presence in Omeme, as well as a well-known building and landmark at the southwest corner of the village's main intersection.

The house is now privately owned and is no longer operating as the manse for the adjacent church. However, despite its change of ownership, its association with the church, and its history and association with prominent historic figures in Omeme remains. It continues to be known for its association with the church, as well as with John McCrea and his youngest daughter, Flora Eaton and her and her husband's broader philanthropic contributions to Omeme and area.

⁹ "Parsonage Opened," 7.

Contextual Value

2 King Street West has contextual value as a local landmark and as a contributing feature to the historic landscape of the village of Omemee. The property is prominent located in the village at the southwest corner of Omemee's primary intersection and is a well-known local landmark for its distinctive Arts and Crafts architecture and for its former role as the Methodist, later United, Church parsonage. It supports the broader character of King Street which includes a variety of commercial, institutional and residential buildings which speak to the village's historic development throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has direct historical, visual and functional relationship to adjacent Trinity United Church, constructed in 1876 as the Omemee Methodist Church, as the former parsonage for the church, as well as to Coronation Hall across the road through the connection of both structures to the Eatons.

The subject property was built in 1910 at the heart of a thriving Victorian village. The village had been established around 1825 with the construction of a mill on the Pigeon River and had grown up around the mill site as an agricultural centre for the surrounding area. Aided by the arrival of the Port Hope, Lindsay and Beaverton Railway in 1857, Omemee had grown into a community of around 600 people by the turn of the twentieth century. The second half of the nineteenth century also brought architectural growth, as pioneer buildings were replaced by more solid, established structures in popular Victorian and later Edwardian architectural styles. It was around this time that King Street also developed as the village's primary thoroughfare, with a stretch of commercial buildings to the east of Sturgeon Street and primarily residential buildings to the west. There are also a number of institutional buildings through the centre of the community, including Trinity United Church and Coronation Hall to the west of Sturgeon Street and Christ Anglican Church to the east of the bridge over the Pigeon River.

The landscape that developed through this period is still extant, although there have been modifications and changes to some properties where older structures have been replaced with more modern buildings. This landscape is an evolved village landscape reflecting its historic growth through the nineteenth and early twentieth century through its collection of diverse historic properties along King Street. In particular, this village landscape includes a range of late nineteenth century Italianate and Second Empire style commercial buildings to the east of Sturgeon Street with residential properties dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century on either side of the commercial core. These residential properties, between one and two-and-a-half storeys, are constructed in a range of popular styles from the mid-nineteenth century onward, as well as in vernacular styles. This includes the subject property which, although it is

unique in its large size and Arts and Crafts design, fits within the broader trends in massing and historic time period seen in Omemee's historic landscape. In this way, it supports and maintains the evolved historic character of the village's core.

The property also has specific historic, functional and visual links to two other buildings in Omemee to which it is directly adjacent: Trinity United Church at 8 King Street West and Coronation Hall at 1 King Street West. The subject property's link to Trinity United Church is the most specific as it was originally constructed as the parsonage for the church, although it is now privately owned. The church was constructed in 1876 as a Methodist church to replace an older church on the same site; it became Trinity United Church with the creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. Although the church has been modified since it was originally constructed, notably with the removal of the spire in 1940, it retains both its historic sanctuary and aesthetic alongside more modern additions. The original manse had been constructed in 1853 and information about it is limited. However, the construction of the new manse on the lot adjacent to the church in 1910 sought to create a united Methodist church property in the centre of the village where the parsonage and church were directly related to each other visually and spatially. The parsonage was constructed so that its primary entrance faced the church creating a cohesive internal relationship between church and manse. Although the parsonage has been sold, its relationship to the church remains, through both its historic and visually relationship.

The subject property is also historically related to Coronation Hall which is located on the opposite side of King Street through both property's relationship to John Craig Eaton and his wife, Flora McCrea Eaton, the youngest daughter of Omemee cabinetmaker John McCrea. The Eatons were regular benefactors in Omemee in the early decades of the twentieth century and donated both buildings to the village, the subject property as the parsonage for the Methodist Church in 1910 and Coronation Hall as the municipal office and concert hall for the village in 1911. Constructed in close succession to one another and across King Street from each other, these two properties reinforce the historic role of the Eatons as benefactors of Omemee and their lasting legacy, of Flora McCrea Eaton in particular, in the community.

The property is also a local landmark, both for its location and its historic role as the Methodist parsonage. The house is constructed at the southwest corner of Sturgeon and King Streets, Omemee's primary and only signalized intersection. This prominent location, its large size and distinctive Arts and Crafts style architecture makes it a visually distinct and easily recognizable building in the community. Its historic connection to the local United Church also help reinforce its status as a landmark to members of the local community where it has long been associated with the church, an important community

gathering space and intuition, giving it meaning in the village as a marker of shared community experience from the early twentieth century. Although the property no longer serves as the manse, it retains this historic relationship to the church and association in Omeme, supporting its value as a local landmark.

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

2 King Street West has design and physical value as a unique, early and large, example of an Arts and Crafts style house in Omemee. Constructed in 1910, the property displays key characteristics of this popular early twentieth century architectural style. These characteristics include its asymmetrical massing, simplified design elements and plentiful windows which were typical of this style which sought a more naturalistic and less ornate style of architecture compared to its Victorian predecessors. It is the largest and most prominent examples of this architectural style in Omemee, where the Arts and Crafts style was primarily used in smaller, more modest Craftsman bungalows throughout the 1910s and 1920s. The house was originally constructed as a parsonage for the adjacent Methodist, now United, church and is known locally as the John McCrea Memorial Parsonage, having been built in memory of John McCrea, a prominent Methodist lay leader and Omemee businessman.

Historical and Associative Value

2 King Street West has historical and associative value as the former parsonage for the Omemee Methodist Church, now Trinity United Church, and in its association with local businessman and Methodist lay leader John McCrea and his daughter Flora McCrea Eaton, later known as Lady Eaton. Flora Eaton had this house built in 1910 in memory of her father, a prominent lay leader in the Methodist Church in Omemee and a respected local citizen and businessman who had died the previous year in 1909. The property yields information regarding McCrea's role in late nineteenth century Omemee as well as the role of the Methodist church in the community at this time when it was a prominent and important local institution.

Contextual Value

2 King Street West has contextual value as a local landmark and as a contributing feature to the historic landscape of the village of Omemee. The property is prominent located in the village at the southwest corner of Omemee's primary intersection and is a well-known local landmark for its distinctive Arts and Crafts architecture and for its former role as the Methodist, later United, Church parsonage. It supports the broader character of King Street which includes a variety of commercial, institutional and residential buildings which speak to the village's historic development throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has direct historical, visual and

functional relationship to adjacent Trinity United Church, constructed in 1876 as the Omemee Methodist Church, as the former parsonage for the church, as well as to Coronation Hall across the road through the connection of both structures to the Eatons.

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 unique example of Arts and Crafts residential architecture in Omemee.

- Two-and-a-half storey buff brick construction
- Irregular massing
- Gable roof
- Chimneys
- Rubble stone foundation
- Two-storey bays
- Sunporch including:
 - Hipped roof
 - Multi-pane windows
 - Coursing
 - Rubblestone knee walls
 - Stairs
 - Pilasters
 - Door
- Brackets
- Decorative brick coursing
- Fenestration including:
 - Irregularity placed and sized windows
 - Lug sills
 - Leaded and coloured glass
- Rear porch
- Date stone

Historical and Associative Attributes

The historical and associative attributes of the property support its value in its association with John McCrea and Flora McCrea Eaton, as well as its association with the Methodist Church in Omemee.

- Association with John McCrea and Flora McCrea Eaton
- Association with the Methodist, later United Church, in Omemee
- Location adjacent to Trinity United Church
- Commemorative panel with text “John McCrea Memorial Methodist Parsonage, Omemee, Ontario, 1910”

Contextual Attributes

The contextual attributes of the property support its value as a contributing feature to the historic village landscape of Omemee, its relationship to Trinity United Church and Coronation Hall, and its role as a local landmark.

- Location at the southwest corner of Sturgeon and King Streets adjacent to Trinity United Church
- Views of the property from Trinity United Church, Coronation Hall, King Street and Sturgeon Street
- Views of Trinity United Church, Coronation Hall, King Street and Sturgeon Street from the property
- Orientation of the house towards Trinity United Church
- Relationship to Trinity United Church and Coronation Hall

Images



McCrea Memorial Parsonage under construction, 1910



McCrea Family, c. 1890. From left, standing: Ellen, John, Anna; seated: Amy, John McCrae, Jane McNeely, Harper; foreground: Flora, Arthur, William.







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