

Research and Evaluation Report



(Town of Halton Hills 2022)

Former Gregory Theatre

72 Mill Street, Georgetown, Town of Halton Hills

May 2022

Prepared by:

Laura Loney, Senior Heritage Planner – Town of Halton Hills

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72 Mill Street | PT LT 18, CON 9 ESQ, AS IN PART 1 OF 635584; T/W 635584; S/T EXECUTION 94-02331, IF ENFORCEABLE

1.0 Property Description

72 Mill Street	
Municipality	Town of Halton Hills
County or Region	Regional Municipality of Halton
Legal Description	PT LT 18, CON 9 ESQ, AS IN PART 1 OF 635584; T/W 635584; S/T EXECUTION 94-02331, IF ENFORCEABLE
Construction Date	c.1958
Original Use	Theatre
Current Use	Commercial Building
Architect/Building/Designer	J.B. Mackenzie
Architectural Style	Vernacular
Additions/Alterations	Reconstructed in 1958; Alterations to exteriors
Heritage Status	Listed
Recorder(s)	Laura Loney
Report Date	May 2022

2.0 Background

This research and evaluation report describes the history, context, and physical characteristics of the property at 72 Mill Street (the former Gregory Theatre) in Halton Hills, Ontario. The report includes an evaluation of the property's cultural heritage value as prescribed by the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

2.1 Historical Background

Early Theatre in the Area

The Gregory Theatre was not the first theatre to open in Georgetown or the surrounding area. The Rex Theatre was located in Georgetown in the old Wesleyan Methodist Church (now Oddfellows Hall) and is advertised in *The Georgetown Herald* as early as October 1914. In Acton, the "Wonderland" moving picture show opened beside Johnstone's hardware store by the Acton Amusement Co. in May 1909.

NEWS OF LOCAL IMPORT.

A Five-Cent Theaterium
 The Acton Amusement Co., which is composed of Morris Haxe, Acton, and Able Maldavor, of Brantford, are arranging to open a permanent five-cent moving picture show in the building west of Johnston's hardware store, about the 21th of May.

Figure 1: May 13, 1909

WONDERLAND
MOVING
Picture Show

Open every night
 7 to 10 o'clock.

The Best Films
Procurable
 (Changed Nightly)

Patronized by the leading citizens.

One Admission - - 5c

Acton Amusement Co.

Figure 2: Advertisement for Wonderland Moving Picture Show (Acton Free Press, March 3, 1910)

WONDERLAND
Moving Picture Theatre
ACTON
 Under new Management

This is to be changed from a 5c. to a 10c. show starting with Christmas day.

MATINEE XMAS AFTERNOON
 Entire change of pictures Christmas night. High-class pictures - Entire change of pictures every other night - Big crowds.

Prices - Adults 10c. Children with parents 5c.

Figure 3: Advertisement in the Dec 19, 1912 issue of the Acton Free Press

The Wonderland theatre was later purchased by Russell Gregory, a native of New York State who had relocated to the area. Gregory is identified as the proprietor of "New Wonderland" as early as 1914 in *The Acton Free Press*, however a change in management was advertised in 1912 (Figure 3).

Rex Theatre

Friday, May 11th

"The Game of Life" showing an English Derby of 70 years ago, 600 of the Light Brigade, Old London Music Halls and Queen Victoria's Coronation Procession. Campbell's Orchestra. Admission 25c and 50c.

Saturday, May 12th

"The Dust Flower" starring Helene Chadwick, Claude Gillingwater and James Reenie. A story hovering over a romantic life. Comedy Creation "False Alarm". Fox Weekly News.

Wednesday, May 16th

"If You Believe It, It's So" starring Thomas Meighen supported by Theodore Roberts, Pauline Starke and J. J. Dowling. The soul stirring drama of a fallen man's battle for love and happiness. Comedy "Just Dogs". Episode No. 1. "Go Get 'Em Hutch".

GEORGETOWN - ONT.

Figure 4: Advertisement for the Rex Theatre in *The Georgetown Herald* (The Georgetown Herald, May 9, 1928)

NEW WONDERLAND!

FRIDAY, MARCH 29
"SHIRLEY KAYE"
 A select picture, with Clara Kimball Young.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30
 "The Silent Lie." A Northwest story, with Miriam Cooper.

TUESDAY, APRIL 2
 "Richard the Brazen," with Alice Joyce and Harry Morey. Episode 5 of "The Fighting Trail," "The Torrent Rush."

COMING
 "The Crisis," by Winston Churchill. Watch for Charlie Chaplin in "The Pawnshop."

R. L. Gregory

Figure 5: Advertisement for the New Wonderland Theatre (Acton Free Press, March 28, 1918)

Gregory constructed the Roxy Theatre along Mill Street in Acton in 1946, however moved the theatre across the street to its current location in 1948. The Roxy Theatre in Acton closed in 1961 and has since served as a dance hall, pool room, barber shop, tavern, nightclub, and café, and most recently a church (Figure 6).



Figure 6: The former Roxy Theatre at 6 Mill Street East in Acton, c.1955 (EHS25052)

In Oakville, Gregory constructed the Gregory Theatre on Dundas Street, also in the 1920s (Figure 7). The Gregory Theatre featured both live performances and films, closing in 1962 like many local theatres at that time. Gregory is identified in voter's lists in 1940 as living on Dundas Street (now Trafalgar Road) in Oakville. Gregory also reportedly had theatres in Erin, Rockwood, and Brampton.



Figure 7: The Gregory Theatre in Oakville, c.1961 (Oakville Historical Society 1950.3.797)

The Gregory Theatre

The Gregory Theatre was constructed by local builder J.B. Mackenzie for Russell Gregory and opened on December 19, 1928 (Figure 8). The longitudinal section of the original architectural drawings for the theatre shows the lobby with apartments on the upper floors, and auditorium and stage at the rear. The cross-section shows the original lobby configuration with detailed window and door openings (no longer extant). The Gregory Theatre featured Georgetown's first "talking movies" and, in addition to serving as a cinema, was also used for live theatre and music events, as well as meetings.

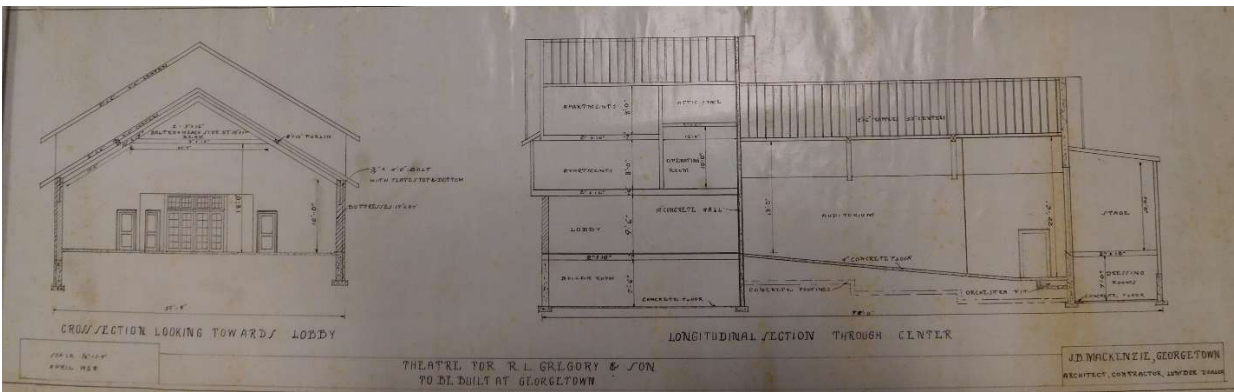


Figure 8: Original drawings of the Gregory Theatre by J.B. Mackenzie (Esquesing Historical Society Archives)

Gregory also advertised commercial space within the theatre in the local paper, noting that it had “[t]wo choice stores, steam heated and with all modern conveniences” in the May 8, 1929 edition of *The Georgetown Herald*. His tenants included the offices of E.A. Benham & Son, Real Estate, and Insurance, which advertised in the local paper in 1930. The second floor of the building houses two residential apartment units.

In 1947, Gregory sold the theatre to Odeon Theatres of Canada, which announced new running times and programming in the September 24th edition of *The Georgetown Herald* the same year. The announcement also says that improvements to the sound and projection equipment would be ongoing, and that the theatre name would be changed to “Roxy”, as with many other Odeon theatres throughout the country. Russell L. Gregory died in 1958 following a long illness.

On April 26, 1958, a fire broke out in the theatre, believed to be caused by firecrackers (Figure 9). A fire proofing screen saved the equipment in the projection room; however, the theatre roof, screen, stage, curtains, and seats were damaged. The theatre’s tenants at the time, Ernie’s Radio appliance store and the M.E. Manderson law office, were evacuated, as well as the tenants in the building’s apartments upstairs. The damage to the building was estimated at \$30,000. The building was later renovated by the original builders; however, the theatre did not reopen.

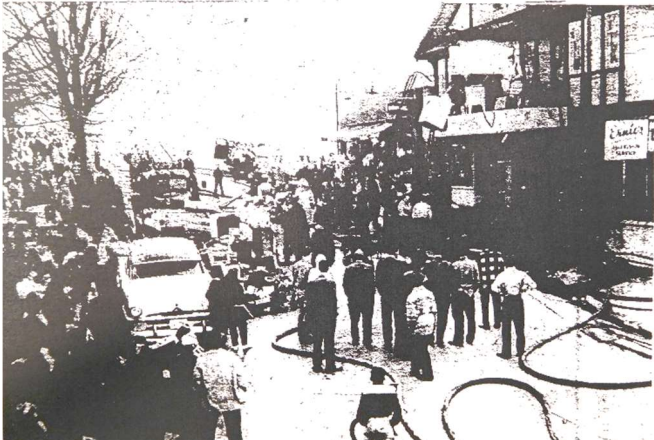


Figure 9: Photograph of the Roxy Theatre Fire, April 30, 1968 (The Georgetown Herald)

In 1963, The Gregory Restaurant opened in the former theatre building, while downstairs the Roxy lounge opened as an entertainment venue (Figure 10). An article in the February 11, 1963 edition of *The Herald* notes that plans were being considered for a piano bar in The Gregory Restaurant, a dinner-theatre at The Roxy, and an outdoor café.



Figure 10: Advertisement for The Gregory/Roxy in *The Herald* (The Georgetown Herald, April 18, 1964, p.11)

A photograph from the 1970s shows the first storey of the theatre with unpainted half-timbering on the upper storeys, prior to modifications to the first storey and subsequent painting of the building (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Photograph of the former Gregory Theatre c. 1970s (The Georgetown Vault 2019)

2.2 Property and Architectural Description

The property at 72 Mill Street is located in the community of Georgetown in the Town of Halton Hills and contains one structure. The c.1958 building is comprised of a two-and-a-half storey structure with gable roof and a two-storey flat-roofed portion towards the rear (Figure 12). As previously indicated, the original Gregory Theatre building was reconstructed by original builder J.M. Mackenzie, following a fire that destroyed the original building in 1958. Original architectural features and detailing, including the original front elevation features and original windows, are no longer extant.



Figure 12: Former Gregory Theatre building along Mill Street (Town of Halton Hills 2022)

The building features a recessed, centrally located entrance at the first storey with brick exterior, with half-timbering and stucco above that has been painted. The second storey features a projection above the central entrance. The brick exterior is painted on the front elevation along Mill Street however is unpainted at the first storey on the side elevations. The roof is supported by decorative brackets. The second storey triple windows are located within projecting bays beneath a projection supported by simple brackets. Beneath the eaves of the upper storey is additional half-timbering with decorative brackets (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Front elevation of the former Gregory Theatre (Town of Halton Hills 2022)

Gable-roofed dormers are located along the sides of the roof and feature small rectangular window openings and decorative brackets on the south elevation and a single slider window and bracketed eaves on the north elevation (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Detail of the upper storeys and roof of the former Gregory Theatre (Town of Halton Hills 2022)

The first storey of the northeast (side) elevation facing the Old Post Office and Customs House features unpainted brick that appears to have been infilled in several locations. Simple rectangular window openings are located along the elevation at the first and second storeys within the two-and-a-half storey portion and two-storey rear portion of the building, which is divided into three bays with brick pilasters (Figure 15). The southeast elevation is obscured by the neighbouring building.



Figure 15: Side elevation of the former Gregory Theatre building (Town of Halton Hills 2022)

The rear elevation faces onto a municipal parking lot. The two-storey elevation is stuccoed and features an entrance with double doors beneath a canopy and two rectangular window openings at the second storey (Figure 16).



Figure 16: Rear elevation of the former Gregory Theatre (Royal LePage 2022)

3.0 Description of Heritage Attributes and Evaluation Checklist

The following evaluation checklist applies to Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the *Ontario Heritage Act*: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. The criteria are prescribed for municipal designation of Heritage Properties under Part IV, Section 29 of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The evaluation tables use an 'X' to signify applicable criteria and 'N/A' to signify criteria that is not applicable for this property.

Design or Physical Value	
Is rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method	N/A
Displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	N/A
Demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement	N/A

The property at 72 Mill Street features a former theatre building, originally constructed in 1928 and rebuilt following a fire in 1958. The property has limited physical and design value due to significant alterations to the property and main theatre façade since its original construction in 1928 and later reconstruction.

Historical or Associative Value	
Has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community	X
Yields, or has potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	N/A
Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant to a community	N/A

The property at 72 Mill Street has historical and associative value due to its direct associations with the history of theatre and entertainment within Georgetown and the surrounding area, as well as with Russell Gregory, a successful theatre proprietor throughout the local area.

Contextual Value	
Is important in defining, maintaining, or supporting the character of an area	N/A
Is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings	X
Is a landmark	N/A

Although the reconstructed theatre building is physically linked to its surroundings in its original location, the property has diminished contextual value due to significant alterations to the building since its reconstruction in the 1950s.

4.0 Summary

Following research and evaluation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 72 Mill Street has historical and associative value, however, does not meet criteria for design and physical or contextual values. The historical and associative value of the property should be commemorated through documentation of the resource and interpretation of the site should the existing building be demolished.

5.0 Sources

Primary Sources:

Archival Photographs, Esquesing Historical Society Archives, Oakville Historical Society, and Halton Images (individual citations in-text)

Ancestry.ca

The Georgetown Herald:

“Real Estate and Insurance.” (June 11, 1930) *The Georgetown Herald*, p.2.
<https://images.ourontario.ca/Partners/HHPL/HHPL000089962p0002f.pdf>.

“Gregory Theatre.” (May 8, 1929) *The Georgetown Herald*, p.3.
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“Rex Theatre.” (November 28, 1928) *The Georgetown Herald*, p.3.
<https://news.halinet.on.ca/89882/page/3?q=theatre&docid=OOI.89882>.

“Theatre Announces New Policy.” (September 24, 1947) *The Georgetown Herald*, p.1.
<https://news.halinet.on.ca/90849/page/294995?q=gregory+theatre>.

“Food in show biz style.” (February 11, 1983) *The Herald Weekend Extra*, p.1.
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“Acton’s opening night featured the first talking movies.” (September 21, 1983) *The Georgetown Herald*. <https://news.halinet.on.ca/2325871/page/1006393?q=gregory+theatre>.

“Town without Theatre as \$30,000 Blaze Guts Roxy.” (April 30, 1958) *The Georgetown Herald*, p.1. <https://news.haltonhills.halinet.on.ca/91420/page/1?q=gregory&docid=OOI.91420>.