

Research and Evaluation Report



(Town of Halton Hills 2024)

Knox Presbyterian Manse
39 Willow Street North, Acton, Town of Halton Hills

May 2024

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Table of Contents

1.0 Property Description	5
2.0 Background	5
2.1 Historical Background	6
2.2 Property & Architectural Description	11
2.3 Architectural Style.....	14
3.0 Description of Heritage Attributes and Evaluation Checklist	15
4.0 Summary	16
5.0 Sources.....	17

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Location Map – 39 Willow Street North	5
Figure 2: Aerial Photograph – 39 Willow Street North	5
Figure 3: Subject property identified on the 1822 <i>Patent Plan</i>	7
Figure 4: Subject property identified on Tremaine's 1858 <i>Map of the County of Halton, Canada West</i>	7
Figure 5: Subject property identified on the 1877 <i>Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Halton</i>	7
Figure 6: Knox Presbyterian Church on Main Street North -- C. 1910 (Ontario Virtual Reference Library courtesy of Vintage Acton)	8
Figure 7: Subject property identified on the 1934 <i>Fire Insurance Plan of Acton</i>	9
Figure 8: Subject property identified on the 1935 <i>Fire Insurance Plan of Acton</i> , detail.....	9
Figure 9: Subject property identified on the 1935 <i>National Topographic Map</i>	9
Figure 10: Knox Presbyterian Manse, c.1945 (Knox Presbyterian Church c.1945).....	9
Figure 11: On the steps of Knox Presbyterian Church Manse, c.1952-1953 (Margaret Coulter via <i>Facebook</i>).....	10
Figure 12: Knox Presbyterian Church Manse, n.d. (Bob Armstrong via <i>Facebook</i>)	10
Figure 13: Subject property identified in 1999 aerial photography	10
Figure 14: Subject property identified in 2011 aerial photography	10
Figure 15: 39 Willow St N, c.2018. (Scott Brooks/Dills Collection, courtesy of Vintage Acton)	11
Figure 16: 39 Willow Street North - Location Map.....	11
Figure 17: Subject property identified in 2023 aerial photography	11
Figure 18: Looking along Willow Street North towards the subject property (Town of Halton Hills 2024)	12
Figure 19: Looking towards the subject property along Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)	12
Figure 20: Front (west) elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)	12
Figure 21: Southwest corner of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)	12
Figure 22: Detail of the existing corner porch at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)	13

Figure 23: Looking towards the south elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024) 13

Figure 24: Looking towards the north elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024) 14

Figure 25: Northwest corner of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024) 14

1.0 Property Description

39 Willow Street North	
Municipality	Town of Halton Hills
County or Region	Region of Halton
Legal Description	LT 73, PL 227, ALSO SHOWN ON PL 1098 ; HALTON HILLS
Construction Date	c.1889
Original Use	Residential
Current Use	Residential
Architect/Building/Designer	Unknown
Architectural Style	Vernacular with Queen Anne influences
Heritage Status	Listed on the Town’s Heritage Register
Recorder(s)	Laura Loney
Report Date	May 2024

2.0 Background

This research and evaluation report describes the history, context, and physical characteristics of the property at 39 Willow Street North in Halton Hills, Ontario (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The report includes an evaluation of the property’s cultural heritage value as prescribed by the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

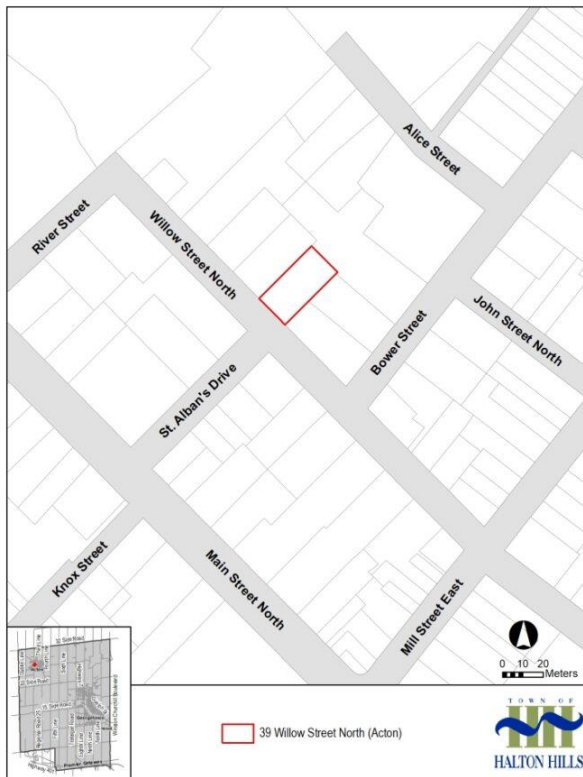


Figure 1: Location Map – 39 Willow Street North

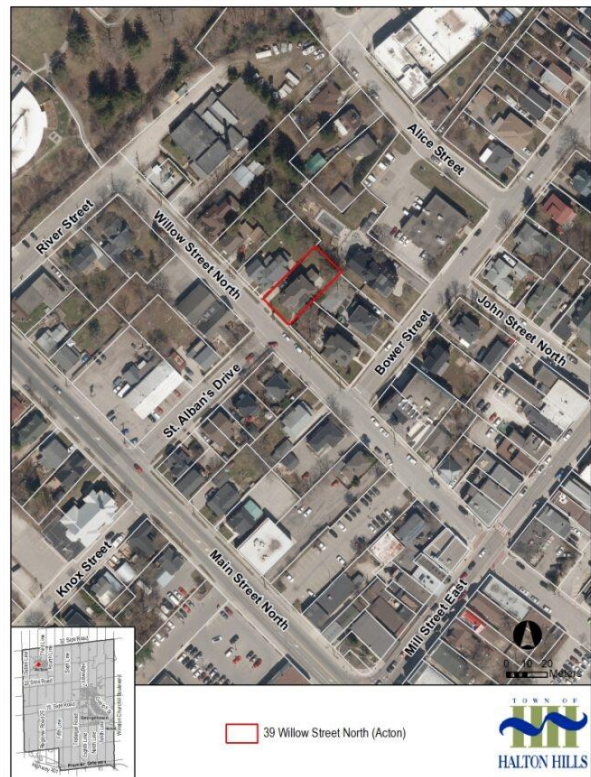


Figure 2: Aerial Photograph – 39 Willow Street North

2.1 Historical Background

Indigenous History

The enduring history of First Nation Peoples in Halton Hills can be traced back through time immemorial before contact with Europeans in the 1600s. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Credit River was central to Indigenous ways of life, supporting settlements, fisheries, horticulture, transportation, and trade. Iroquoian-speaking peoples, ancestors of the Wendat, occupied the Credit River Valley for hundreds of years until the mid-1600s, establishing semi-permanent villages. There are numerous archaeological sites in Halton Hills dating from this period, ranging from village sites to burial grounds, which reveal a rich cultural heritage.

The Wendat were displaced by the Haudenosaunee around 1649-50 amid the conflicts that arose between European colonial powers and their First Nation allies. The Mississaugas (part of the Anishinaabe Nation) arrived in southern Ontario in the 1690s, settling in two groups along the north shore of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The western group, occupying the area between Toronto and Lake Erie, became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Until the early 19th century, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation followed a seasonal cycle of movement and resource harvesting along the Credit River (Missinnihe, meaning “trusting creek”), and other rivers. In the winter months, extended family groups hunted in the Halton Hills area, travelling south towards the mouth of the river in the spring for the salmon run. The Mississaugas’ fisheries and traditional economies were diminished because of increased Euro-colonial settlement, leading to a state of impoverishment and dramatic population decline.

In 1818, the British Crown negotiated the purchase of 648,000 acres of land from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, including present-day Halton Hills, under the Ajetance Treaty (No. 19), named after Chief Ajetance. This left the Mississaugas with three small reserves on the Lake Ontario shoreline. The legitimacy of early land “surrenders” to the Crown is questionable when considering the Mississaugas’ traditional understanding of property ownership. Unlike the British, the Mississaugas understood land in spiritual terms, and did not share the idea that access to land and resources could be given up permanently¹.

Early Settlement

In 1829, Lot 28, Concession 3 was granted to the Canada Company. Three years later, Rufus Adams purchased the lot. The orchard lane within the property later became Bower Avenue.

¹ This brief overview of Pre-Treaty Indigenous Territory within the land now known as Halton Hills is taken from the Town of Halton Hills’ 2023 *Cultural Heritage Strategy*. This document includes additional recommendations relating to Truth and Reconciliation in Heritage Planning as part of the Town's commitment to advancing Truth and Reconciliation.



Figure 3: Subject property identified on the 1822 Patent Plan



Figure 4: Subject property identified on Tremaine's 1858 Map of the County of Halton, Canada West



Figure 5: Subject property identified on the 1877 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Halton

The subject property was severed from the Adams farm in 1883. The property was later purchased by the Knox Presbyterian Church, and the existing residence was constructed as the Presbyterian manse in 1889. Reverend and Mrs. Rae and their family moved to the new manse on Willow Street, a block away from the new church building, in the fall of 1889.

Knox Presbyterian Church

Knox Presbyterian Church in Acton was established in 1845, founded by Scottish settlers from Inverness, Aberdeen, and Perthshire.

The original church building for the Presbyterians in Acton was a frame building on Main Street. Construction on the building was finalized in 1847, and Reverend W.C. Burns gave the first sermon in the building. In 1857, Reverend John McLachlan was inducted as the church's first minister. McLachlan's home was a farm in the east end of Acton, and after his death the church acquired the house as the

manse, also purchasing the surrounding 24.5 acres as a glebe². This property served as the manse until 1889 when it was purchased by a Mr. James Russell.

In 1895, a new church building was constructed at the corner of Main Street and Knox Avenue on the site of a general store that had burned down. The church was opened in February 1895.



Figure 6: Knox Presbyterian Church on Main Street North -- C. 1910 (Ontario Virtual Reference Library courtesy of Vintage Acton)

The existing building at the subject property was constructed in 1889 under the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church at the time, Reverend J.W. Rae. Local reports in July 1899 identified that the foundation had been finished that month and that brickwork was soon to follow. The new manse location would allow a shorter commute for the church minister and more opportunities for the congregation to visit. The construction of the manse reportedly faced criticism for its extravagance and maintenance costs; the manse was constructed for \$6000 and by 1898, only \$600 of the debt to construct was remaining.

On June 15, 1899, the *Acton Free Press* (p.3) reported that a baby girl was born to the minister of Knox Church, Reverend Knowles, and that a Union Jack was flying from the flagpole at the manse.

According to reports in the *Acton Free Press* over the years, the manse was a frequent site for social activities, parties, church events, and local marriages.

² A “glebe” is a plot of cultivated land, or land belonging to or yielding revenue to a parish church or ecclesiastical benefice (*Merriam-Webster*).



Figure 7: Subject property identified on the 1934 *Fire Insurance Plan of Acton*

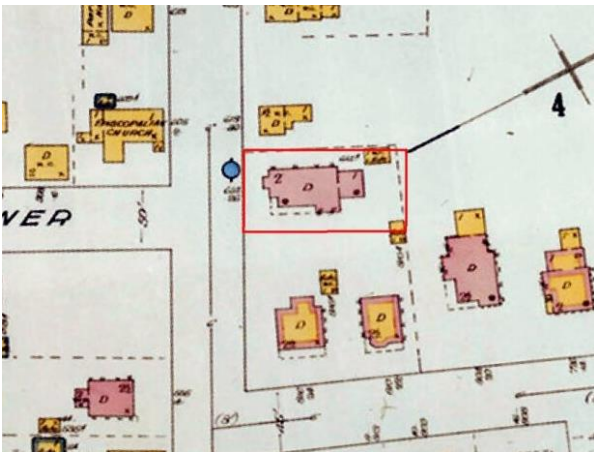


Figure 8: Subject property identified on the 1935 *Fire Insurance Plan of Acton*, detail



Figure 9: Subject property identified on the 1935 *National Topographic Map*

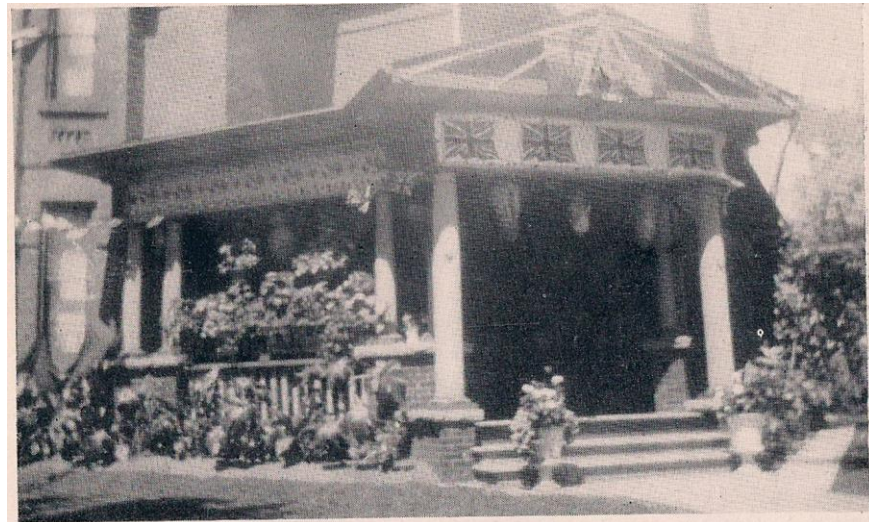


Figure 10: Knox Presbyterian Manse, c.1945 (Knox Presbyterian Church c.1945)



Figure 11: On the steps of Knox Presbyterian Church Manse, c.1952-1953 (Margaret Coulter via Facebook)



Figure 12: Knox Presbyterian Church Manse, n.d. (Bob Armstrong via Facebook)

The property was sold by the church in 1987 to Katherine and Patricia Kelly, who later sold to Cameron Hall and Rene Einarson. In 1990, the property was sold to its current owners.



Figure 13: Subject property identified in 1999 aerial photography



Figure 14: Subject property identified in 2011 aerial photography



Figure 15: 39 Willow St N, c.2018. (Scott Brooks/Dills Collection, courtesy of Vintage Acton)

2.2 Property & Architectural Description

The subject property is located along the north side of Bower Street in the community of Acton in the Town of Halton Hills. The property contains a single-detached, two-storey brick residential building with a combination hip and gable roof.



Figure 16: 39 Willow Street North - Location Map



Figure 17: Subject property identified in 2023 aerial photography



Figure 18: Looking along Willow Street North towards the subject property (Town of Halton Hills 2024)



Figure 19: Looking towards the subject property along Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)

The front (west) elevation facing Willow Street North dominated by a two-storey projection with gable roof. Within this portion of the façade, a two-storey bay is extant, featuring decorative wooden bargeboard within the gable peak. The two-storey bay features flatheaded window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills, with three at each storey. Paired brick string courses featuring bricks laid in a horizontal and vertical pattern between the two extend along the elevation at the first and second storeys within the running-bond brick elevation. An additional string course divides the first and second storeys within the projecting bay, with decorative brick detailing above the course and below the upper storey windows. Another string course is located directly above the brick voussoirs within the second storey window openings, with additional string courses and decorative brick detailing beneath the gable peak and partially obscured by the wooden bargeboard.

The brick string courses extend along the recessed portion of the front elevation and continue along the side elevation.



Figure 20: Front (west) elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)



Figure 21: Southwest corner of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)

The defining feature of the existing building is its one-storey wooden porch which wraps the front and side elevations. The porch, featuring paired smooth wooden columns supported by brick piers with simple wooden balusters, is accessed via stone steps to the wooden porch floor. Wooden dentils are

extant beneath the porch eaves, and the entrance to the porch features a classical pediment in the Classical Revival style. The main entrance to the building is located beneath the porch, with an additional entrance towards the rear of the side elevation.



Figure 22: Detail of the existing corner porch at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)

The side (south) elevation features flatheaded window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and the extension of the brick string courses that stretch along the front elevation.



Figure 23: Looking towards the south elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)

The side (north) elevation features similar flatheaded window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills as the south elevation, with two brick chimney extant above the roofline at this elevation.



Figure 24: Looking towards the north elevation of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)



Figure 25: Northwest corner of the existing building at 39 Willow Street North (Town of Halton Hills 2024)

The rear elevation and interiors were not investigated as part of this report.

2.3 Architectural Style

The former Knox Presbyterian Manse at 39 Willow Street North has previously been identified as a representative example of a Queen Anne Revival residential building.

The Queen Anne style was built primarily between 1870-1880 to 1910 and was popular amongst the wealthy upper middle classes as buildings in this style are designed to be impressive. Shannon Kyles notes in *Ontario Architecture* that the inspiration of Queen Anne Revival architecture was from medieval principles of neighbourhoods and towns that focused on craftsmanship and community. The style featured a variety of decorative elements and forms, with complex and variable aesthetics that served to express the success of those who built the homes, often featuring characteristics such as asymmetrical facades, steeply pitched and irregular rooflines, front-facing gables, overhanging eaves, towers with turrets in the corners, unusual windows, detailed textures, and bright colours. John Blumenson of *Ontario Architecture* notes that the style features open covered areas such as verandahs and that wood supporting members may appear large and oversized, with the trim often appearing intricate, complex and delicate by comparison.

The former Knox Presbyterian Manse serves as a representative example of a Queen Anne Revival residence, with key features extant that are characteristic of the style. Namely, its asymmetrical façade, steeply-pitched and irregular roofline, front-facing gable, overhanging eaves, two-storey projecting bay with detailed wooden bargeboard, detailed textures within the brickwork on the exterior, and the large, wrap-around wooden porch with significant wooden columns and classical pediment. While not the most extravagant example of Queen Anne architecture in Acton (e.g. Sunderland Villa at 55 Mill Street East), of note is the early criticism of the Presbyterian congregation with the extravagance and cost of

the manse, and the following appreciation of the building's architecture and form since its construction at the end of the nineteenth century.

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 utilize 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	X
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 39 Willow Street North has physical and design value as a representative example of a late nineteenth-century Queen Anne Revival residential building. The former manse's asymmetrical façade, steeply-pitched and irregular roofline, front-facing gable, overhanging eaves, two-storey projecting bay with detailed wooden bargeboard, detailed textures within the brickwork on the exterior, and the large, wrap-around wooden porch with significant wooden columns and classical pediment contribute to its representation as a unique interpretation of the style within the community of Acton.

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 39 Willow Street North has historical and associative value due to its over 100 years of use as a manse for the Presbyterian Church in Acton. Reflecting the growth of the early Presbyterian congregation in Acton, the church constructed its second manse at the subject property under the minister at the time, Reverend J.W. Rae. Over the years, the property was a frequent site for social activities, parties, church events, and local marriages. The existing building served as a manse for almost 100 years for the Presbyterian church until it was sold in the late 1980s.

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

The property at 39 Willow Street North has significant contextual value as late nineteenth-century Queen Anne Revival residential building at the corner of Bower Street and Willow Street North in the community of Acton. Together with the neighbouring properties along Bower Street, the existing building helps to define and maintain the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century

development of this residential neighbourhood on the periphery of Acton's historic downtown. The property and existing residence are physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings in the community and has maintained its significant presence along the streetscape as captured in historical photography. The property is similar in scale and materials to the neighbouring properties and has not been identified as a landmark in the area.

4.0 Summary

Following research and evaluation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 39 Willow Street North has physical and design, historical and associative, and contextual value and therefore meets Ontario Regulation 9/06 criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest.

The heritage attributes of the property at 39 Willow Street North are identified as follows:

- The setback, location, and orientation of the existing late 19th-century residential building along Bower Street in the community of Acton in the Town of Halton Hills;
- The scale, form, and massing of the two-and-a-half storey building with multi-sloped roof with brick chimney, modest brick plinth slightly projecting above the stone foundation, and stone foundation;
- The materials, including the red brick exterior and architectural detailing, stone sills, and stone foundation;
- The front (southeast) elevation, including:
 - The two-storey bay with three flat-headed window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills, and decorative brick string courses, at the first and second storey;
 - Brick string courses with horizontal and vertical brick patterns between each brick band at the first and second storey;
 - Brick brackets under the window openings along the first storey;
 - Gable peak with decorative wooden bargeboard and wooden brackets beneath;
 - Inset decorative brickwork featuring angled bricks beneath the windows at the second storey, and the gable peak;
 - One-storey wooden porch with classical pediment along the southeast and southwest elevations, with plain wooden columns, wooden dentils beneath the porch eaves, brick pier supports and plain wooden balusters;
 - Front entryway with sidelights and transom;
- The side (northeast) elevation, including:
 - Flat-headed window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills at the first and second storeys;
 - Brick string courses with horizontal and vertical brick patterns between each brick band at the first and second storey;
- The side (southwest) elevation, including:
 - Flat-headed window openings with brick voussoirs and stone sills at the first and second storeys;
 - Two brick chimneys projecting above the roofline.

The rear elevation, rear addition, and interiors have not been identified as heritage attributes as part of this report.

5.0 Sources

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