

977 Unsworth Avenue, Burlington

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE AND DESCRIPTION OF
HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The property at 977 Unsworth Avenue is recommended for designation pursuant to *Part IV* of the *Ontario Heritage Act* based on its historical associative value; its contextual value; and its design value.

Historical Associative Value

The property has historical significance due to its association with Albert Gorton Unsworth (1906-1986) who was co-owner with his father George Unsworth of Unsworth & Son, one of the earliest commercial greenhouse operations in Ontario. The business was established in the late 1880s by George Unsworth who was an early pioneer in growing vegetables under glass, specializing in tomatoes, lettuce, and cucumbers. The first cold frames were built using sash from the Crystal Palace in Hamilton after it was dismantled in 1891. By 1904, there were five purpose-built greenhouses and a water tower on the property. In the early years George grew fruit and vegetables.

When Albert joined his father's greenhouse business in the 1920s, the name was changed to Unsworth & Son. With Albert's help, the business underwent a major expansion. In 1925 a 2-storey brick Packing Plant & Boiler House was built and over the next decade a row of six large greenhouses was built behind it, all supplied by heat from the boiler house. The boiler fed steam under the soil in the greenhouse to keep it warm and also kill any mould or bacteria. By 1940, Unsworth & Son had a total of 120,000 square feet or about 3 acres under glass.

The produce supplied by Unsworth & Son was highly regarded and George Unsworth developed his own varieties, including one tomato variety that he named 'Happy Day'. In 1939, Unsworth & Son was awarded a prestigious contract to supply tomatoes for the royal train during the visit of King George VI to Canada.

As part of the major expansion of the business in the 1920s & 30s, both George and Albert built impressive residences for themselves on the greenhouse property. An Arts & Craft style house was built on Plains Road West for George and a Neo-Tudor style house was built on Unsworth Avenue for Albert. Albert's house was built the same year that he married and his wife's initials 'P.M.E' for Pearl McIlwraith Evans and his own initials 'A.G.U' for Albert Gorton Unsworth and the date '1932' are carved on a stone crest on the front of the house. Pearl (1908-1986) was born in Binbrook and was a registered nurse at the time of their marriage. After her marriage

she did business training and became the bookkeeper at Unsworth & Son. George & Pearl had three daughters, Lois (Reynolds), Eleanor, and Katharine (Perkins).

Albert took over the business after his father's retirement in 1955 and his daughters and son-in-law took over the business when he retired in 1970. As the price of fuel rose, the business shifted to growing flowers. Two of the large greenhouses were demolished and the land sold to a developer who built a residential subdivision. One of the streets in the subdivision is named Greenhouse Place. The business closed in the early 2000s, ending more than a century of greenhouse operation on this site by three generations of the Unsworth family. The remaining greenhouses and the brick plant were demolished, and the land was sold for development of a senior's residence. Today the Unsworth houses are the only structures that remain from the former Unsworth & Son complex.

Contextual Value

The property has contextual value because it was built in 1932 for Albert Unsworth adjacent to the Unsworth & Son greenhouse complex. Both he and his father lived on the property so they could oversee the greenhouse operation that required constant supervision. The Unsworth houses predate residential development in this area and are located on Unsworth Avenue, a street that is unique in the area because of its central boulevard and row of silver maples planted by George Unsworth in the early 1900s.

The Albert Unsworth House is contextually linked to the adjacent George Unsworth House at 336 Plains Road West that was also a component of the Unsworth & Son greenhouse complex and was built for his father around the same time.

The Unsworth family has connections with Aldershot that date back to 1848 when Giles Gorton, a Liverpool cotton broker, first moved to this area. The original Unsworth property was located a short distance to the north of the Unsworth & Son site, but Giles' son Albert later acquired the George Long property that included an orchard on the south side of Plains Road. This property along with additional acreage purchased by Albert's son George provided room for setting up and expanding the Unsworth's greenhouse business.

The residences of George and Albert Gorton Unsworth, as the last remaining structures associated with Unsworth & Son, contribute to an understanding of Aldershot's heritage as an early fruit and vegetable growing area and its reputation in the early 20th century as 'the Garden of Canada'.

Architectural Value

The Albert Gorton & Pearl Unsworth House was built in 1932 to designs by Hamilton architect Walter Scott. Scott also designed and oversaw construction of the adjacent George Unsworth House that was built around the same time.

Walter Scott (1880-1941) was born in Hamilton and attended the Hamilton Art School. He gained architectural training with several prominent architectural firms in New York City before

returning to Hamilton to set up his own architectural practice in 1913. Aside from a brief partnership with Lindsay A. Wardell from 1918 to 1921, he worked under his own name. His work has not been fully documented but he is known to have designed a number of churches, schools, and houses in Hamilton and surrounding areas. The Unsworth houses are good examples of the high quality of his work.

The Unsworth houses are excellent examples of Arts & Crafts Style architecture and both feature high slate roofs and open porches integrated into the roofline. Both are characterized by a high degree of craftsmanship in the varied use of materials.

The Albert Gorton & Pearl Unsworth House is a good example of a Neo-Tudor style dwelling. Tudor details include the Tudor arch and panelled door at the front entrance, the multi-paned casement windows, the two-storey bays with a flat roof, and the picturesque roofline and tall chimney. The stonework is striking and combines irregularly sized blocks, smooth faced ashlar, and carved and cast stone trim and ornamentation. The steeply pitched roofs have slate tiles with copper flashings and ornate downspouts. There is a set of stone steps in the front yard that appear to have been built at the same time as the house. The interior features Tudor details such as wood panelled walls and decorative plaster ceilings in the principal rooms on the ground floor.

Description of Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes that contribute to its cultural heritage value are primarily associated with the exterior elements of the original 1932 design.

The heritage attributes are:

Contextual features:

- its orientation towards Unsworth Avenue
- its relationship to the George Unsworth House located at 336 Plains Road West

Exterior features:

- the exterior stone and stucco walls
- the steeply pitched roofs and porch roof with slate tiles and copper flashings
- the open porch supported by squared wood beams on stone piers
- the stone chimney
- the ornamented downspouts
- the multi-pane casement style windows
- the 2-storey bay windows with a flat roof
- the front entrance with a panelled wood door, Tudor style stone surround, and small rectangular windows that flank the doorway
- the stone crest inscribed with the date '1932' and the initials 'P.M.E' and 'A.G.U' on the front of the house

Acknowledgement:

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- Joan Downey, Archivist at the Burlington Historical Society
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- Lyn Lunstead, Archivist at the Flamborough Archives
- Erin Aults, Library and Archives Specialist at the Royal Botanical Gardens
- Shannon Kyles, President of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (Hamilton Branch)
- Rob Hamilton, Past President of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (Hamilton Branch)
- Joyce Vanderwoude, Burlington Horticultural Society

Sources:

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-----, 'Unsworth Development marks end of an Era' (15 Feb 1994; p. 1)

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LACAC Burlington, Burlington Heritage Resource Inventory; '977 Unsworth Avenue' (1997)

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-----, *From Pathway to Skyway Revisited; The Story of Burlington*. (1997)

Reynolds, Lawrence J. *Sounds by the Shore: A History of Burlington, Ontario, Canada* (1993)

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Tweedsmuir Women's Institute, 'Aldershot Volume 1', pp. 305-307

APPENDIX A: PHOTO DOCUMENTATION



FRONT ELEVATION – view from Unsworth Avenue



FRONT ELEVATION – oblique view from Unsworth Avenue capturing the open verandah on the north side of the house



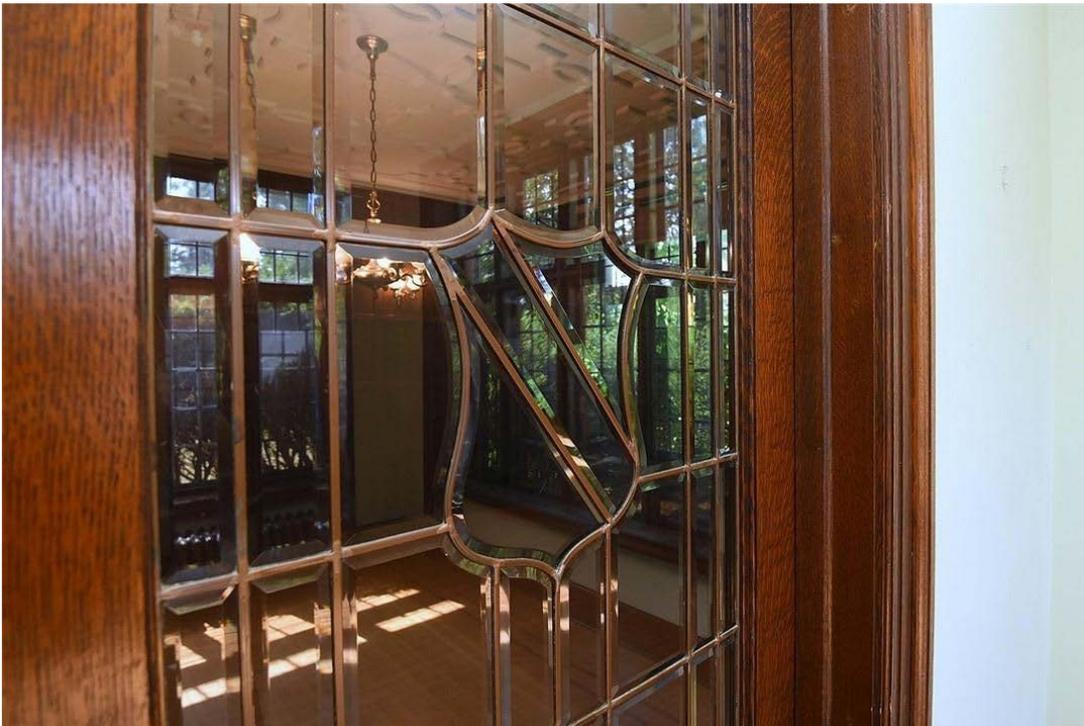
UNSWORTH AVENUE – view of the grass boulevard down the middle of Unsworth Avenue planted with trees, the Albert Unsworth House on the right and the associated George Unsworth House just visible on the far left



DATE STONE & MARRIAGE MEMORIAL – detail showing the stone crest on the front of the house with the initials 'P.M.E' for 'Pearl McIlwraith Evans' & 'A.G.U' for 'Albert Gorton Unsworth' and '1932' that indicates the date of construction and memorializes their marriage that took place in August, 1932.



INTERIOR – wood panelled walls and decorative plaster ceiling in the dining room REMAX REALTORS



INTERIOR DOOR – leaded glass

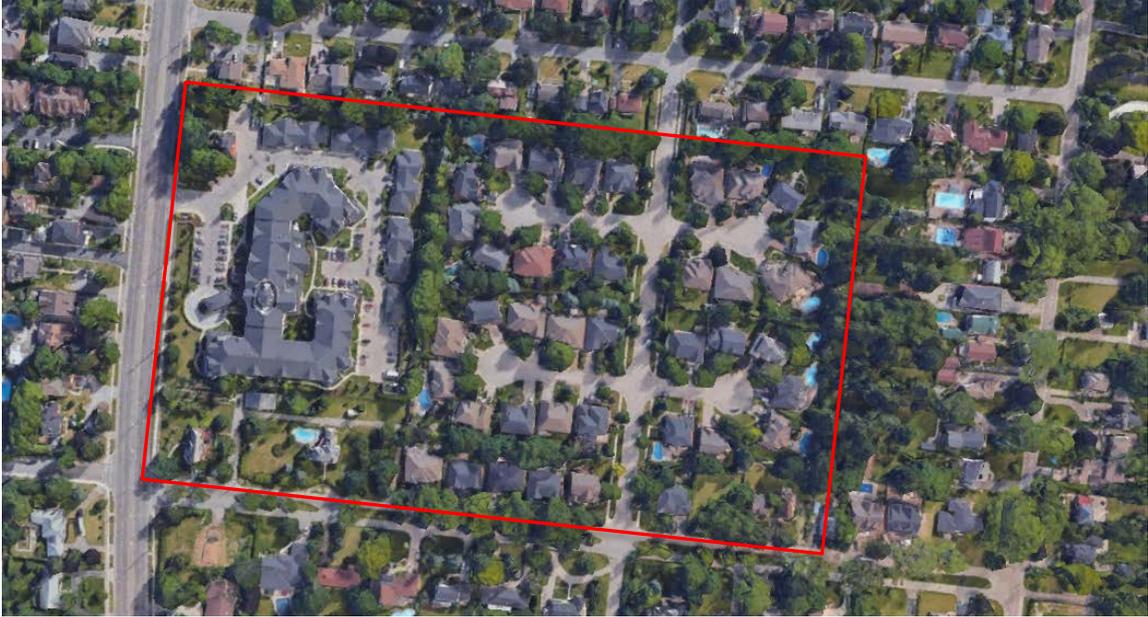
REMAX REALTORS



STONE STEPS – oblique view from Unsworth Avenue that captures the front and south side of the house and the stone steps down to the remnant orchard

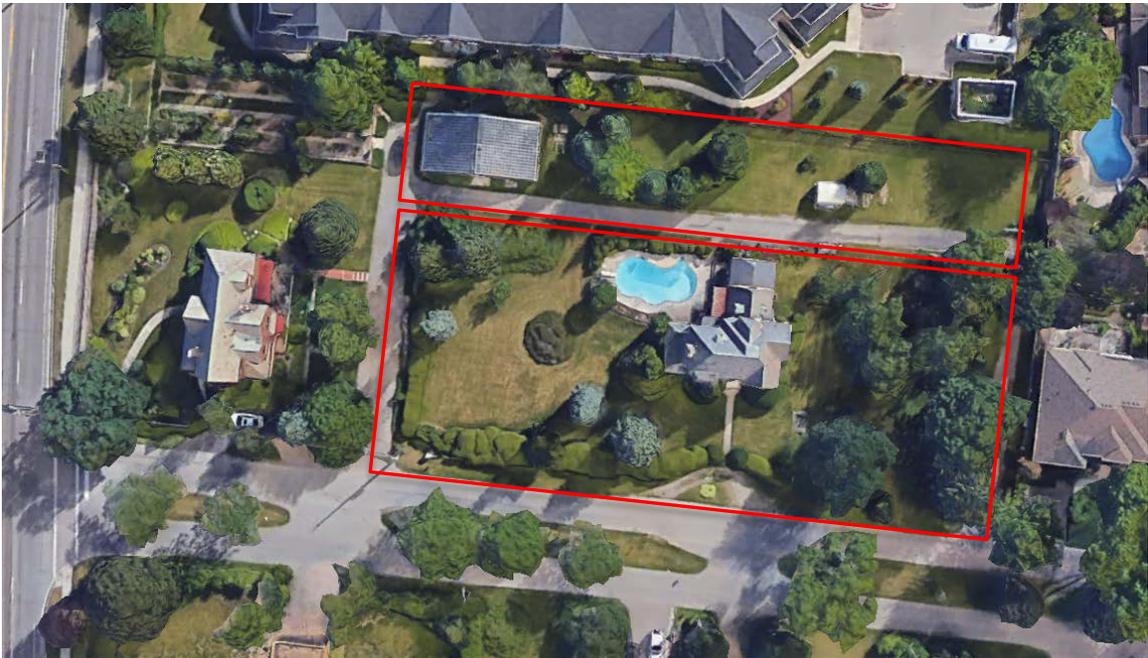


REMNANT ORCHARD – view of the south side yard that contains a large silver maple planted by George Unsworth in the early 1900s and a remnant fruit orchard containing apple and pear trees. In the 1970s, an 'Osaga Orange' tree at 977 Unsworth Avenue was added to the City of Burlington's 'Honour Role of Trees'.



AERIAL PHOTO – original extent of the Unsworth & Son property

GOOGLE EARTH



AERIAL PHOTO – 977 Unsworth Avenue is comprised of two parcels. The parcel on Unsworth Avenue contains the house. The remnant greenhouse is located on a separate parcel along the rear.



ADJACENT PROPERTY - Albert Unsworth House, 336 Plains Road West, built c. 1930 to designs by Walter Scott

SHANNON KYLES

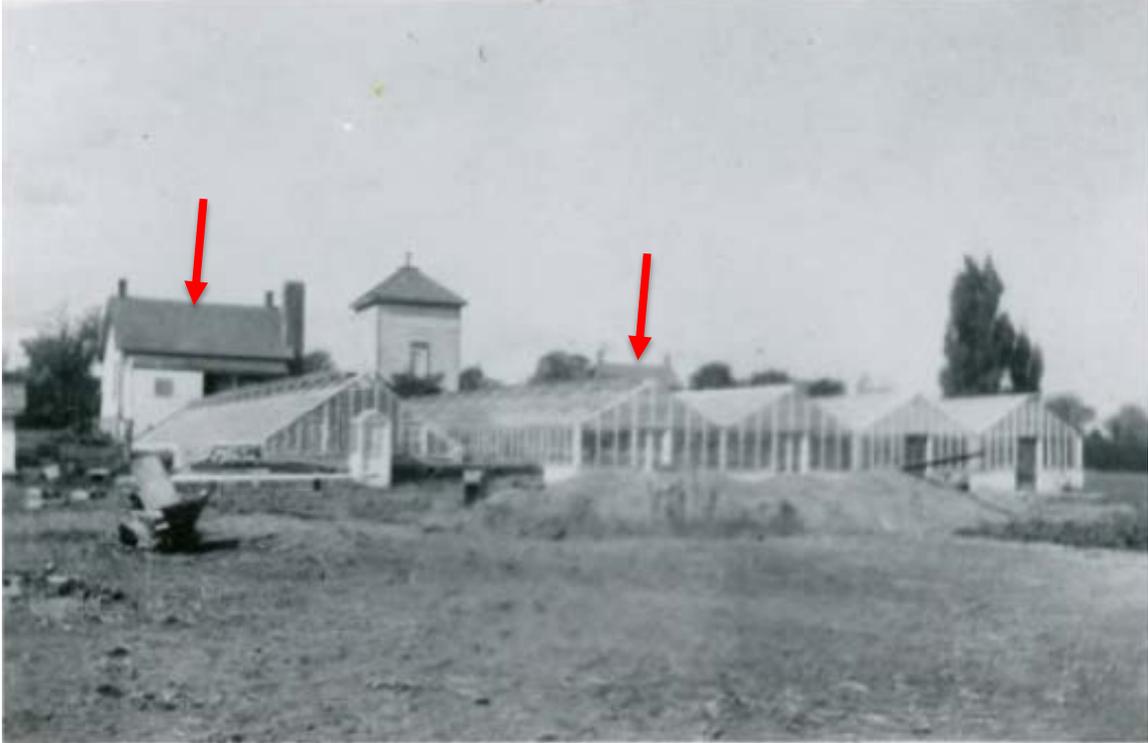


c.1897 PHOTO - George Unsworth's first cold frames built in the 1890s from sash from the Crystal Palace and erected in an old fruit orchard on his property
BHS



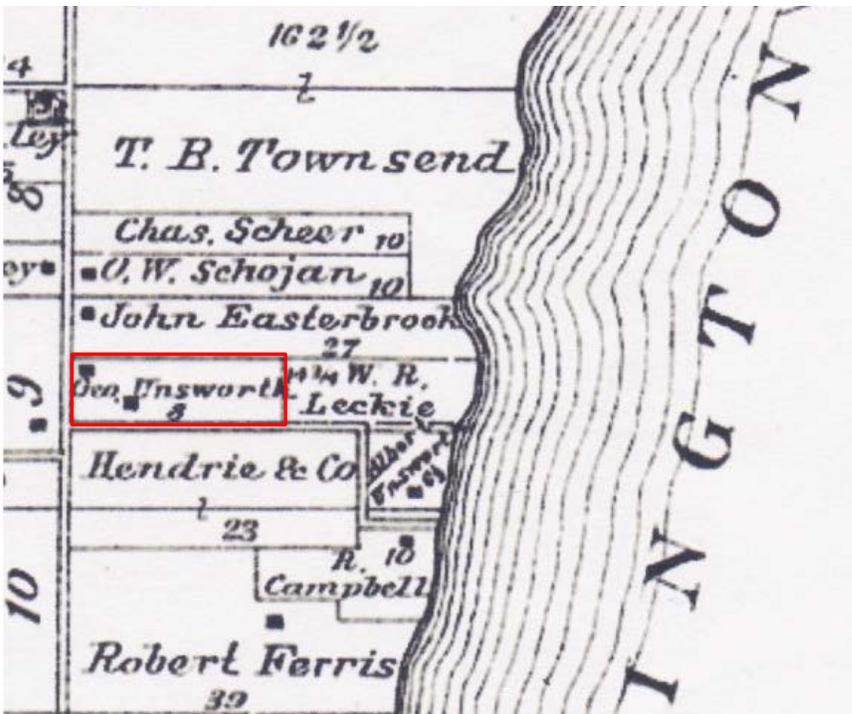
RESIDENCE OF GEO. UNSWORTH, ESQ., ALDERSHOT.

1902 PUBLICATION – a photo of George Unsworth's earliest greenhouse is included as a notable place in Aldershot in *The Garden of Canada; Burlington, Oakville & District* published in 1902



c.1904 PHOTO – this photo shows 5 greenhouses, 2 houses, and a water tower on the Unsworth property. The houses were later moved to 909 and 913 Unsworth Avenue.

TWEEDSMUIR



1903 MAP – this map shows the property owned by George Unsworth on the south side of Plain Road West – the two houses seen in the c.1904 photo are recorded on this map



c. 1925 PHOTO – this aerial photo shows the 5 small greenhouses and the brick boiler house connected to 2 large greenhouses
PRIVATE COLLECTION

George Unsworth

Grower of Hot House Products

Specialties: Lettuce, Cucumbers and Tomatoes



Phone Regent 5644

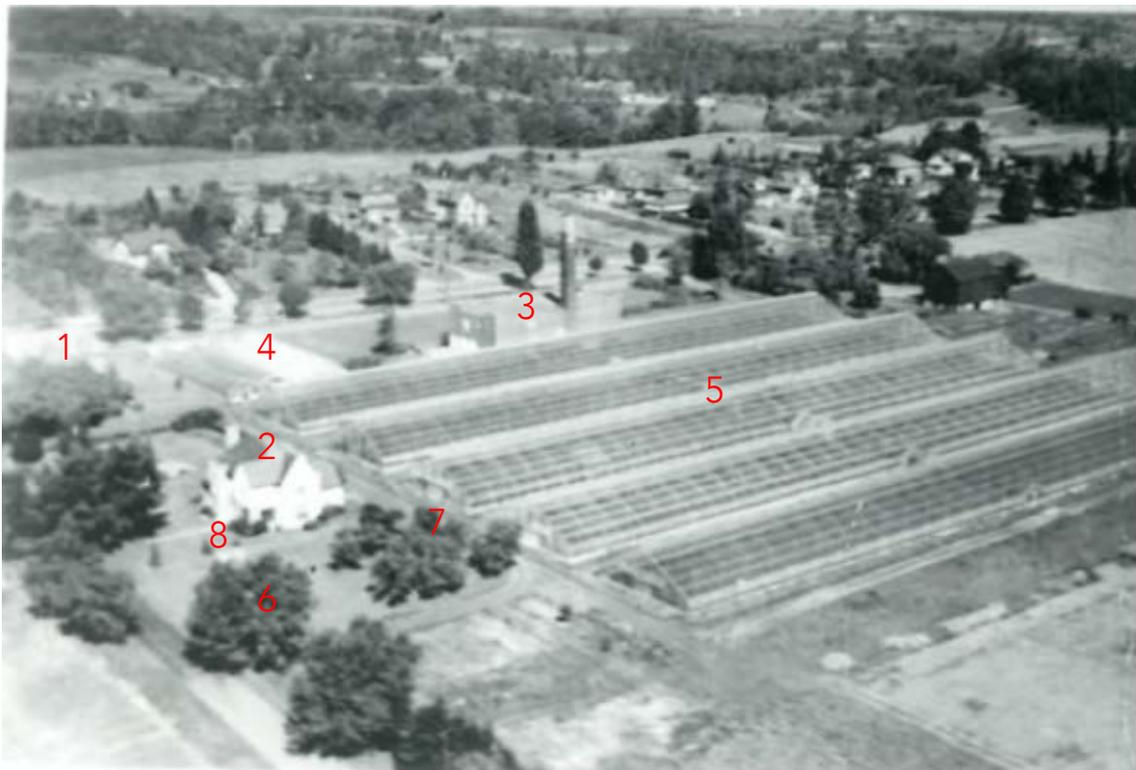
Aldershot,
Ontario

COMPANY LETTERHEAD – 'George Unsworth, Grower of Hot House Products. Specialties; Lettuce, Cucumbers and Tomatoes'

FLAMBOROUGH ARCHIVES



undated PHOTO – 2-storey red brick packaging plant and boiler house built for Unsworth & Son in 1925
TWEEDSMUIR



1936 AERIAL PHOTO – 1. George Unsworth House, built c. 1930 2. Albert & Pearl Unsworth House, built 1932. 3. The Unsworth & Son Packing Plant & Boiler House, built 1925. 4. The 5 small greenhouse, built c. 1900-1920 5. The 5 large greenhouses, built c.1920-39. 6. The row of silver maples along Unsworth Avenue, planted by George Unsworth, c.1910?, 7. The remnant orchard on the south side of the house. 8. The stone steps down to the orchard, built 1932
TWEEDSMUIR * annotated by the author



1938 PUBLICATION - a house design published by Walter Scott that is very similar to his design for the George Unsworth House at 336 Plains Road West. *Plan Book of Canadian Homes*, vol 3 (Maclean's, 1938)
SHANNON KYLES

8

WALTER SCOTT
ARCHITECT

110 MONTREAL

Cost of construction of Residence of George Unsworth, Esq. Aldershot

Mason	Wade, Englin	4100 00	✓
Carpenter	Parry & Rosie	6613	✓
Slate Roof	Trull & Son	1332 90	✓
Plumbing Heat	Goodman Bros	2534 00	✓
Plaster	Hanna, Jrd & Son	274 20	✓
Painting	M. Kelly	75 00	✓
Steel Sash	J. Cavendish	1700 00	✓
Hardware	Carroll Co.	177 00	✓
Stone	Herbert Bros	229 00	✓
Lamps Entr.	Mela	48 00	✓
Tiles/Mantels	Leit Co.	1217 56	✓
Glass Doors	Pilkington Bros	248 60	✓
Screens	Higgins Co.	392 00	✓
Electric	Low & Farrell		
Total		19802 26	✓

Architects Commission 4.5% on 10000 00 450 00

Commission received on account 450 00

Balance 176 26

Price Statement

490.10

176.26

INVOICE (DATE ILLEGIBLE) – invoice from Walter Scott for construction of a residence for George Unsworth in Aldershot. The contractors that built the house are identified.



1939 UNSWORTH & SON TOMATOES – supplied to the Royal Train during the King George VI's visit to
Canada in 1939
TWEEDSMUIR



1943 TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP – the large greenhouse operation is denoted on topographical maps – this map shows both Unsworth houses, the boiler house and the large field of greenhouses behind it



1954 AERIAL PHOTO – there are now 6 large greenhouses behind the boiler house - Unsworth & Son is surrounded by new residential development by this time but there is still a large open field to the south of the greenhouses for future expansion



GEORGE UNSWORTH – the c.1900 greenhouses visible on the left, the 1925 boiler house visible behind, and the first of the large greenhouses visible on the right
BHS



GEORGE UNSWORTH – standing at the entrance to one of small greenhouses
BHS

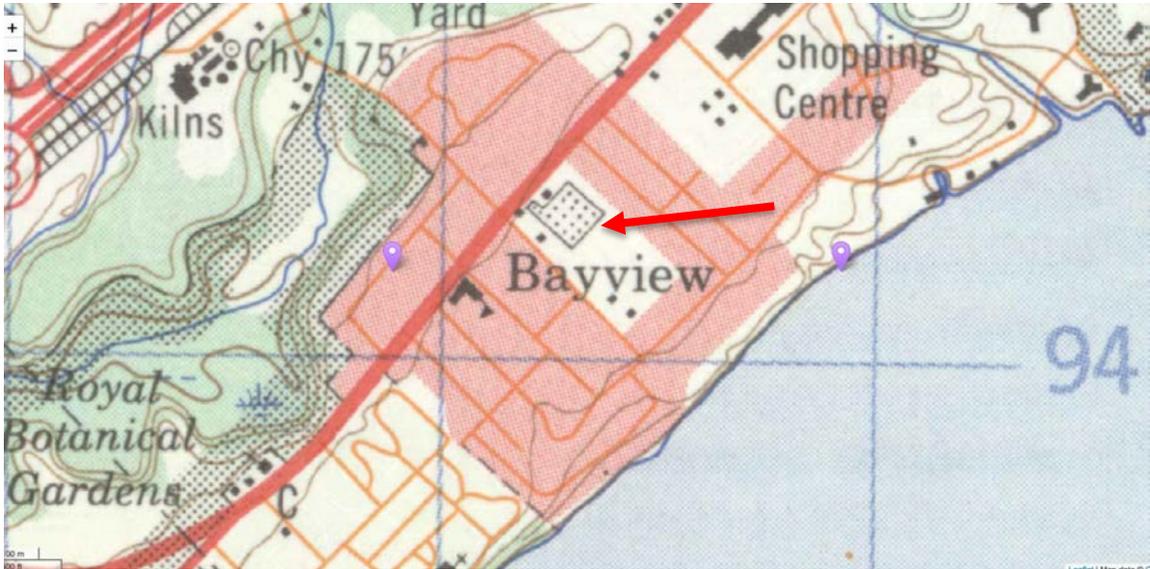


ALBERT GORTON UNSWORTH – standing inside one of the large greenhouses

BHS



1969 TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP – the subdivision is named 'Willow Cove' at this time



1978 TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP – the subdivision now has its present name 'Bayview'



1960s? AERIAL PHOTO – two of the large greenhouses have been demolished by this time and a new residential subdivision has been built. One of the new streets in the subdivision is named 'Greenhouse Place'.
BHS



1997 PHOTO - the 2-storey brick packing plant & boiler house built in 1925 was still in use at this time. BHS



2004 PHOTO - the glasshouses being demolished after sale of the property to a developer BHS



2004 PHOTO - a few bays at the east end of the large glasshouse closest to Plains Road West was preserved and is still standing at the end of the driveway between the Unsworth houses BHS