

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 fruits 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 casements 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 that contribute to its historical and contextual significance are:

- its orientation towards Unsworth Avenue, a street that is named after the Unsworth Family and is associated with the one of the earliest commercial greenhouses businesses in Aldershot established by George Unsworth in the late 1880s and operated by three generations of the Unsworth family in this location for over a century
- its relationship to the George Unsworth House located at 336 Plains Road West, that was built for his father and business partner George Unsworth around the same time in a similar Arts & Crafts architectural style and was also part of the former Unsworth & Son greenhouse property

The heritage attributes that contribute to its architectural significance as an excellent example of Arts & Crafts design with Neo-Tudor elements and a high degree of craftsmanship in various materials are:

- 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 tall 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

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