

# Wellington Square Townhouses

Sault Ste. Marie

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### Reason for Designation

The Wellington Square Townhouses were erected in 1913 at the corner of Pim and Wellington Streets and consisted of five commodious townhouses financed by the Lake Superior Paper Company for its executives. A substantial building, designed by the Architectural firm of Moran and McPhail, transcribes a number of architectural elements used at the time into a successful example of building massing producing a scale and ambiance well suited to the site and social standing of its owners.

“An up-to-date block of five houses”; “the latest ideas in heating and plumbing” - these are two of the phrases which described the new Wellington Square townhouses in the year 1913. They are taken from a short article and photograph titled “Here is Wellington Square, on Pim and Wellington Streets, erected by Mr. W.J. Hesson, an up-to-date block of five houses” which reads:

“The houses are occupied as follows, beginning at the left: Mrs. Robert A. Moore, Mr. M. L. Millspaugh, Mr. A. G. Smith, Mr. R. L. Godfrey, A.C.R. Comptroller and Mr. F.N. Lloyd. The houses are very commodious, some of them having as many as six or seven bedrooms. Each one has a fireplace and the latest ideas in heating and plumbing. The general idea of Wellington Square is Mr. Hesson’s own, but Messrs. Moran and McPhail licked the plan into final shape.”

Mr. Hesson was the owner of a local building supply company which, although it has changed hands and locations, is still in operation today. Stewart B. Moran and Albert H. McPhail had their own architectural firm which was located in Sault Ste. Marie from 1912 to 1914.

The building was built with the idea of creating a luxurious residence for the tenants. The 1913 article defers to the units as being “very commodious” with some of them having “as many as six or seven bedrooms”. As well, each unit had a fireplace on the main level. The main level had an oak hardwood floor and an open oak staircase leading to the second level. It was a combination of these interior features, along with the hot water heating system, the indoor plumbing and the occasional stained glass window, which made these units luxurious living quarters.

The original cost of the building, as per a tax assessment of later years, was put at \$16,000. According to local citizens, some of them were employed by Abitibi-Price. The Lake Superior Paper Company was involved in the financing of the Wellington Square building. The Lake Superior Paper Company, which is the predecessor of Abitibi-Price, was incorporated in 1911 with the financial backing of Colonel Jones from Dayton, Ohio. This company amalgamated with the Spanish River Pulp and Paper Mill Ltd. in 1917 and was eventually taken over by Abitibi Power and Paper Co. on August 7, 1928.

Unfortunately, during the takeovers, the records of the Lake Superior Paper Company went astray. As a result, documented proof of the financing is unavailable, but after examining the tenants of the first seven years, an interesting fact is revealed. Of the twenty tenants who lived in Wellington Square, ten were employed by Lake Superior Paper Company and the majority of them were either foremen, managers or engineers. This fact seems to circumstantially document the statement that the building was financed by the said company for its executives.

Throughout the years there were a number of other tenants not directly connected with the Lake Superior Paper Company. They were from all walks of life such as Fred N. Lloyd, who was the principal of both Central School and Campbell School; I. L. Robertson, who was the local Chief of Police at one time. There was also C. M. Reynette, the Manager of Bell Telephone Co. of Canada Ltd; and D. Warner-Smith, who held the position of Director of Music for the Sault Ste. Marie Public Board of Education. Then

there were the eighty odd other tenants who, if their history could all be researched, would turn up a number of noteworthy citizens of Sault Ste. Marie.

Wellington Square is unique in that it is one of the first, if not the first, buildings of its type in Sault Ste. Marie. There may have been other townhouses at the time but there definitely were none as luxurious as these. These townhouses were quite large with each unit consisting of three floors and a basement. Another unique feature of the townhouses was they were not built in a straight row as many are today, but rather they were built on a corner lot and the units turned the corner.

The uniqueness of this building is found not only in its concept but also in its style, because it does not fall into any particular common category of the time and is seen to be more of a combination than anything else. Even the porches, which are a common site to anyone living in the older downtown portion of Sault Ste. Marie, are a collection of different styles. The Wellington Street elevation consists of one continuous porch with square columns supporting, while the Pim Street elevation is non-continuous with one porch having round columns supporting and the other having no columns at all. Though there does not seem to be a cohesiveness of style, there is one important aspect which ties this building together and that is its massing.

The massing of the building is quite successful. The relationship which the roof has to the walls is good. The proportion of the two creates a good visual balance with neither one overpowering the other. The full length porch on the Wellington Street elevation, which is split into an odd number of divisions, is in keeping with the upper two stories which are divided by five and three windows. The porch creates the sense of balance necessary to bring out the symmetry found in this façade. The two sets of porch steps as well are balanced about the axis of symmetry. The Pim Street elevation does not have such a direct relationship as the Wellington Street elevation, but there is a relationship found at the entrance which is common to two of the units. The building is set back at this point to emphasize the entrances. On the roof is found a small parapet running perpendicular to the elevation which has no structural purpose and serves as an axis of symmetry for entranceway.

The fenestration of the windows along these elevations also add to the success of the building as a whole. There is the right number of windows to make the building look residential yet not too busy like an office building. The vertical positioning of the windows is well balanced. Unfortunately, the windows on the lower level have been replaced with more modern, full-size picture windows. The original windows were quite similar to the third storey windows only larger. Instead of six panes in the upper portion of the double hung windows, there were nine panes, each nine inches square. Like the upper level there were two windows in each opening. These original windows on the first level created a visual tie with the third level windows making the building look more consistent as a whole.

The third level, which in many old houses becomes a storage area, became something more than this due to the use of the mansard roof. Visually the mansard roof acts like a top hat and makes a good finish to the top of the building. The bottom two levels are made to seem as one not only visually with the brick on the outside but also by the open staircase found inside. The third level is separated not only on the outside by the change of materials but also on the inside through the use of a closed staircase. There could be a number of reasons for the closed staircase being used. One possibility is that

the third level was used as servants' quarters. Another possibility would be that the third level was shut off in the event that only three bedrooms and not six were required by the tenant.

The main structure of the building is brick veneer construction. The brick is an orangish brown colour with a black mortar between. The porches are made of wood as are the porch steps. The columns supporting the porch roofs are wood and are painted the traditional white along with the porch cornice. The main cornice of the building is also painted white in contrast to the dark asphalt shingles of the roof. This is also true of the trim around the dormer windows. The sides of the dormer windows which project above the mansard roof are covered with wood shingles. The corners of the building are emphasized not only by the large double set of scroll brackets found there but also by offset brickwork that is encountered. For three feet along each side of the corner, the bricks are set out by one thickness from the main wall. The scroll brackets create an end to the series of modillions found along the underside of the main cornice. Smaller scroll brackets are also used above the columns of the porches.

Wellington Square as a whole is quite successful in its massing. The height of the building is similar to those adjacent to it in the surrounding streetscape. The building has been very successful in the way it meets the corner of the lot, turns and continues. The building is not finely detailed but rather is a good example of the importance of a building in its whole. It was built to be a set of large, luxurious townhouses and was intended for the people who were 'well off'. The spacious size of the Wellington Square units is an important feature because no other buildings of the time were built like this.

The success that Wellington Square has achieved comes from its ability to fit into its context and from the design in the massing of the building. Overall, the Wellington Square building was unique in its purpose and is successful as a building and hence, is worthy of preserving in our community.

## Photos Taken: July 2004

