

Downsview United Church

Description

The property at 2822 Keele Street is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, associative and contextual value. Historical records describe the development of Downsview United Church (1870), which is located on the west side of Keele Street, north of Wilson Avenue.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Downsview United Church is a well-crafted example of Gothic Revival architecture. As the most popular style for churches in the mid to late 19th century, Gothic Revival features include pointed-arch openings, polychromatic brickwork and buttressed walls. With its visible steeple, Downsview United Church is one of only four surviving churches in North York dating to the 1800s that are recognized on the City's heritage inventory.

Downsview United Church is associated with the historical development of the local community where it stands as an important institution. The area now known as Downsview originated as a rural area east of Weston, which was served by a school and churches near the crossroads of Keele Street and Wilson Avenue. When a post office opened in 1869, it took the name "Downsview" from the Keele Street farm of Squire John Perkins Bull, a justice of the peace and the patriarch of a significant local family.

The origins of Downsview United Church date to 1844 when a Wesleyan Methodist congregation was organized in the area. Squire Bull held worship services at his home until the first church was completed in 1850. The present structure dates to 1870 and was constructed according to the designs of Toronto architect J. W. Stubbs. Originally known as York Methodist Church, it was renamed Downsview Methodist Church in the early 1880s. The congregation joined the United Church of Canada in 1925, which was created through the amalgamation of Methodist, Congregationalist and many Presbyterian churches. Downsview United Church was enlarged with the extension of the chancel (1882) and the addition of a Sunday School (1937) and Christian Education Wing (1955). The original, highly decorative spire was damaged during a storm and replaced. Widely known in the 19th century for its revival meetings and musical entertainment, Downsview United Church has served for over a century as a spiritual, social and educational centre in the community.

Contextually, Downsview United Church is a local landmark. With the George Jackson House at 2950 Keele Street to the north and the Squire John Perkins Bull House at 450 Rustic Road (southwest of Keele Street and Wilson Avenue), the church is one of only

three remaining 19th century edifices in the Downsview community that are included on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of Downsview United Church related to its design, associative and contextual value as a well-crafted example of Gothic Revival styling, an important institution in the community, and a local landmark are:

- The scale, form and massing of the rectangular plan that rises one extended storey above a stone foundation
- The red brick cladding, with contrasting yellow brick, stone and wood detailing
- The steeply pitched gable roof with brick parapets and stone coping at the east and west ends
- The organization of the principal (east) façade into three bays by a central tower and corner buttresses with stone weatherings and gablets
- The square tower, with buttresses, pairs of lancet window openings with stone heads and sills, and a hexagonal spire
- The main entrance at the base of the tower, where a pointed-arch opening is set in a stone surround and contains double plank doors with iron hinges and a transom with tracery
- Above the entry, the datestone labeled “1870”
- The pointed-arch window openings above and flanking the entry with stone hood moulds, sills and carved corbel stops
- The repetition of pointed-arch window openings on the side elevations (north and south), which are divided into four bays by buttresses, where the first bay from the east end is narrower than the others
- The west wing (chancel) of the church, where the north elevation has a secondary entry in the east bay and segmental-arched window openings with contrasting brick voussoirs in the remaining bays (its remaining walls are concealed by the other additions to the complex, which are not included as heritage attributes)