

St. Matthew's United Church

Description

The property at 259 Rushton Road (formerly known as 729 St. Clair Avenue West) is worthy of inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties for its cultural heritage value. Historical records indicate that St. Matthew's United Church was completed in 1924 on the southeast corner of St. Clair Avenue West and Rushton Road.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

St. Matthew's United Church has design value as a well-crafted example of Renaissance Revival design applied to a religious building. The style was inspired by 16th century Italian architecture and is identified by the symmetrical placement of architectural elements with round-arched openings and decorative corbelled brickwork. The additions to St. Matthew's United Church complement the original design in materials and stylistic elements.

St. Matthew's United Church has associative value as an institution of importance in Bracondale. The origins of the area date to the mid 1800s when Robert Turner established a country estate named "Bracondale Hill" on the rise of land along Davenport Road, west of present-day Christie Street. As parts of the estate were severed and sold, a village developed in the vicinity. Following the annexation of Bracondale by the City of Toronto in 1909, Turner's heirs subdivided the remaining acreage for residential development.

A Methodist congregation was organized in the Bracondale in the late 19th century and constructed two church buildings by 1915. The current church was dedicated in 1924 as St. Clair Avenue Methodist. The next year, it was renamed St. Clair Avenue United Church following the creation of the United Church of Canada through an amalgamation of Methodist, Congregational and some Presbyterian congregations. In 1966, St. Clair Avenue United Church merged with the neighbouring St. Columba United Church (located at 540 St. Clair Avenue West) as St. Matthew's United Church and retained the property at 259 Rushton Road. Since that time, three additional United Church congregations have joined St. Matthew's. Its congregation continues to serve the local community by providing social programs for disadvantaged people and constructing Bracondale House, a seniors' residence, directly east of the church.

St. Matthew's United Church is also connected to the practice of Toronto architects Wickson and Gregg. After forming a partnership in 1905, the pair accepted commissions for a range of institutional, commercial, residential and recreational buildings. Many of the firm's projects, including the Central Reference Library (1907) on College Street (now the Koffler Student Services Centre at the University of Toronto) are recognized on the City's heritage inventory. Wickson and Gregg's projects for religious bodies

included Timothy Eaton Memorial Church (1915) at 230 St. Clair Avenue West and the neighbouring Calvin Presbyterian Church (1926) at 26 Delisle Avenue.

Contextually, with its prominent position on a corner lot along St. Clair Avenue West in Bracondale, St. Matthew's United Church is a local landmark.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of St. Matthew's United Church related to its design, associative and contextual significance as a good example of Renaissance Revival design that is an institutional landmark on St. Clair Avenue West are:

- The scale, form and massing of the long rectangular plan, which rises one extended storey with the short walls aligned parallel to St. Clair Avenue
- The red brick cladding with brick, stone and wood trim
- The low-pitched gable roof with a multi-sided open belfry and a finial
- On the principal (north) façade, the corbelled and patterned brickwork, the stone decoration with urns and plaques, and the enclosure of the gable end as a pediment
- The fenestration on the north façade, with trios of flat-headed window openings with brick and stone detailing in the lower floor and tall round-arched window openings with brick surrounds and continuous stone sills above
- At the west corner of the north wall, the cornerstones from the former and current churches marked 1878, 1884 and 1924
- On the side elevations (east and west), the placement of entrances in the north bays in enclosed gable-roofed porches with diminutive round-arched window openings
- The entrances, which are set in flat-headed openings flanked by brick piers with stone trim (the original doors have been replaced)
- The clerestory windows with flat-headed openings flanked by stone medallions
- The single-storey east and west wings that form the side aisles and display round-arched window openings
- The west wall facing Rushton Road, which incorporates a square tower, a secondary entry and pointed-arched window openings with brick and stone detailing
- The rear (south) church hall, which complements the main building with its materials and detailing