

Intention to Designate under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act – 65 Centre Avenue

Date:	March 12, 2014
To:	Toronto Preservation Board North York Community Council
From:	Director, Urban Design, City Planning Division
Wards:	Willowdale – Ward 24
Reference Number:	P:\2014\Cluster B\PLN\NYCC\NY14024

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council state its intention to designate the property at 65 Centre Avenue under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. Located on the south side of Centre Avenue, east of Yonge Street in the North York neighbourhood of Newtonbrook, the site contains the Alexander Robertson House (1914), a 2½-storey detached house form building that is listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

On December 10, 2013, the owner of the property at 65 Centre Avenue submitted an application to Toronto Building to demolish the house form building and was advised of the requirement to submit an application to demolish a listed building under the Ontario Heritage Act. To refuse demolition, City Council must state its intention to designate the property at 65 Centre Avenue under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council state its intention to designate the property at 65 Centre Avenue (Alexander Robertson House) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, in accordance with the Statement of Significance: 65 Centre Avenue (Reasons for Designation) attached as Attachment No. 3 to the report (March 12, 2014) from the Director, Urban Design, City Planning Division.

2. If there are no objections to the designation in accordance with Section 29(6) of the Ontario Heritage Act, City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the bill in Council designating the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.
3. If there are objections in accordance with Section 29(7) of the Ontario Heritage Act, City Council direct the City Clerk to refer the designation to the Conservation Review Board.
4. If the designation is referred to the Conservation Review Board, City Council authorize the City Solicitor and appropriate staff to attend any hearing held by the Conservation Review Board in support of Council's decision on the designation of the property.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

The property at 65 Centre Avenue was listed on the Inventory of Heritage Properties by the City of North York prior to the amalgamation of the new City of Toronto in 1998 when it was absorbed into the city-wide heritage inventory.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In December 2013, the owner of the property at 65 Centre Avenue submitted a demolition application to Toronto Building. Because the site is listed on the City's heritage inventory, the property owner was advised of the requirement to submit an application to demolish a listed building under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Following notification of the potential demolition, staff commenced the research and evaluation process to determine whether the Alexander Robertson House at 65 Centre Avenue merits designation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06, the provincial criteria prescribed for municipal designation. To refuse the demolition of a property listed on the City's heritage inventory, City Council must state its intention to designate the site under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

COMMENTS

A location map (Attachment No. 1) and photograph (Attachment No. 2) are attached.

Staff have completed the attached Heritage Property Research and Evaluation Report (Attachment No. 4) and determined that the property at 65 Centre Street meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation. The property at 65 Centre Avenue has design and contextual values as a highly-crafted early 20th century house form building that is set apart by its pattern brick detailing, architectural integrity and status as one of the few surviving heritage buildings in Newtonbrook that reflects the evolution of the area from a cross-roads community to a residential suburb.

The Statement of Significance (Attachment No. 3) comprises the Reasons for Designation, which is the Public Notice of Intention to Designate and will be advertised on the City of Toronto's web site in accordance with the City of Toronto Act provisions and served on the property owners and the Ontario Heritage Trust according to the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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City Planning Division

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment No. 1 - Location Map
Attachment No. 2 - Photograph
Attachment No. 3 - Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation)
Attachment No. 4 - Heritage Property Research and Evaluation Report



This location map is for information purposes only;
the exact boundaries of the property are not shown.

The **arrow** marks the location of the site.
Centre Avenue is seven streets south of Steeles Avenue East.



Alexander Robertson House

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: 65 CENTRE AVENUE ATTACHMENT NO. 3
(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)

Alexander Robertson House

Description

The property at 65 Centre Avenue is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets the provincial criteria prescribed for municipal designation under the categories of design and contextual values. Located on the south side of Centre Avenue, west of Yonge Street and south of Steeles Avenue East, the Alexander Robertson House (1914) is a 2½-storey house form building was listed by the former City of North York and included in the city-wide City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties following amalgamation in 1998.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The property at 65 Centre Avenue has cultural heritage value for its design as a well-crafted house form building from the World War I era in Newtonbrook whose appearance illustrates the transition from the decorated styles of the Victorian period to the more restrained classicism of the early 20th century. While the Alexander Robertson House displays the L-shaped plan, bay window and pattern brickwork from the 19th century Gothic Revival style, its scale and pedimented gables identify its post-1900 design. The house form building is particularly distinguished by the two-tone pattern brickwork where red accents are applied to buff brick surfaces in a reversal of the typical colour combination.

Contextually, the Alexander Robertson House is valued for its historical and visual relationship to Newtonbrook, the North York community that emerged along Yonge Street between Finch and Steeles Avenues in the mid 19th century. While the hamlet originated as a milling centre and provided services to local farmers, Newtonbrook became known as the location of the Humberstone Pottery and a number of carriageworks in the late 19th century. After the first residential subdivision was introduced west of Yonge Street in the 1840s, it was followed in the next decade by William Nichols' survey of "park and cottage lots" east of Yonge where the Alexander Robertson House was built in the World War I era. With the Newtonbrook Store (c.1907) and the Rueter House (c.1870) on Drewry Avenue, the property at 65 Centre Avenue is one of only three remaining sites linked to the development of Newtonbrook that is recognized on the City of Toronto' heritage inventory. The Alexander Robertson House retains its cultural heritage integrity and demonstrates the evolution of Newtonbrook from a 19th century rural hamlet to a 20th century residential suburb reflecting the growth of North York.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the property at 65 Centre Avenue are:

- The house form building known historically as the Alexander Robertson House
- The setback, placement and orientation of the building on the site
- The scale, form and massing on the 2½-storey L-shaped plan
- The materials, with the buff brick cladding and the contrasting red brick trim applied for the quoins and the detailing on the windows and verandah
- The cross-gable roof with the pedimented gables (north, west and south) and the brick chimney (east)
- The main entrance (north), which is covered by the single-storey verandah with brick detailing that extends across the north and west elevations (the verandah has been enclosed and altered over time)
- The fenestration, with the flat-headed window openings on the principal (north) and side (east and west) walls, including the oversized opening on the north façade and the single-storey bay window on the west elevation

HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT



ALEXANDER ROBERTSON HOUSE
65 CENTRE AVENUE, TORONTO

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services
City Planning Division
City of Toronto

February 2014

1. DESCRIPTION



Above: East (left) and north (right) elevations;
Cover: principal (north) façade (Heritage Preservation Services, 2013)

65 Centre Avenue: Alexander Robertson House	
ADDRESS	65 Centre Avenue (south side, between Yonge Street and Willowdale Avenue)
WARD	24 (Willowdale)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	Plan 189, Part Lot 28
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Newtonbrook
HISTORICAL NAME	Alexander Robertson House
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1914
ORIGINAL OWNER	Alexander Robertson, gardener
ORIGINAL USE	Residential (single house form building)
CURRENT USE*	City of Toronto park * This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	None found
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	Brick cladding with brick, stone and wood detailing
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	See Section 3
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	Date unknown: verandah altered; pre-1990: carport added
CRITERIA	Design/Physical and Contextual
HERITAGE STATUS	Listed on City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties
RECORDER	Heritage Preservation Services: Kathryn Anderson
REPORT DATE	February 2014

2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 65 Centre Avenue, and applies evaluation criteria to determine whether it merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The conclusions of the research and evaluation are found in Section 4 (Summary).

i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Key Date	Historical Event
1856	William Nichols registers Plan 189 for "town and park lots in the village of Newton Brook" (sic)
1878	Nichols's subdivision is illustrated on the <u>Historical Atlas for York Township</u>
1904	Thomas Street, a farmer in Newtonbrook acquires Lot 28 under Plan 189
1914 Apr	Alexander Robertson purchases Lot 28
1914 May	Robertson is recorded in the tax assessment rolls for York Township as the owner of a vacant five-acre parcel
1915 April	A house valued at \$1400 is assessed on Robertson's property
1922	The Township of North York is incorporated, absorbing parts of York Township, including the subject property
1944 April	Robertson's heir sells the property to Marguerite Smith
1952	Marguerite Smith begins selling portions of the five-acre tract
1953-1981	The infilling of building lots along Centre Avenue is shown on aerial photographs
Pre-1996	The property at 65 Centre Avenue is listed on the heritage inventory for the former City of North York ¹

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Newtonbrook

The property at 65 Centre Avenue is located in the North York neighbourhood of Newtonbrook. After the founding of the Town of York (Toronto) in 1793, York Township to the north was organized into concessions encompassing 200-acre farm lots. Yonge Street, the main route north of York, was surveyed in 1796 and built incrementally during the following decades. At the north end of Yonge between Finch and Steeles Avenues, a farming and milling hamlet developed a near branch of the Don River in the mid 19th century (Image 2).

Originally known as "Newton Brook", the origins of the community date to the 1840s when the first residential subdivision opened on Drewry Avenue west of Yonge Street.² Small scale industries including the locally famed Humberstone Potteries joined churches and a schoolhouse near the cross-roads, while several inns and taverns served the horse-drawn streetcar line along Yonge Street. When a post office opened in 1863, the

¹ The listing description for the Alexander Robertson House was published in the Directory to the Inventory of Heritage Properties prepared by the City of North York in 1996

² Blazing a Road to Grandeur, 21

community's name was shortened to Newtonbrook. The hamlet was regarded as "the carriage trade centre of old Toronto" in the 1870s with seven carriage makers supported by a number of black smiths.³ The population was measured at 200 inhabitants at the close of the 19th century.

After 1900, Newtonbrook remained a cross-roads community adjoining farmland, with access to Toronto provided by the Metropolitan Branch of the Toronto and York Radial Railway (Images 5 and 6). At Yonge and Drewry, the general store and post office was replaced c. 1907 by a new building, which survives at 5926 Yonge Street (where it is recognized on the City's heritage inventory and shown in Image 10). The second half of the 20th century produced dramatic changes in Newtonbrook with the development of new residential subdivisions to support the post-World War II population surge (as traced in the aerial photographs attached as Images 7-9).⁴ The Rueter House (c.1870) on Drewry Avenue (Image 11) and, to the east, the Alexander Robertson House on Centre Avenue remained in place during the transition of Newtonbrook.

Alexander Robertson House

The property at 65 Centre Avenue was surveyed and registered by William Nichols in 1856 as part of a small subdivision of "town and park lots" in Newtonbrook. Nichols' plan combined smaller parcels along Yonge Street with larger tracts to the east, including Lot 28 on the south side of present-day Centre Avenue (Image 3). Nichols sold the allotment in 1861 and, after several changes in ownership, it was acquired in 1904 by Thomas Street, a member of a local farming family in Newtonbrook.⁵

Alexander Robertson, a Scottish-born gardener purchased Lot 28 in April 1914 and, the next month, he was recorded on the tax rolls for York Township as the owner of a vacant five-acre parcel.⁶ A year later, Robertson and his family occupied a house valued at \$1400.⁷ The Robertson family retained the property until 1944.⁸ The new owner, Marguerite Smith and her family occupied the house for over 30 years, but began subdividing the adjoining lands in 1952.

The property at 65 Centre Avenue was listed on the heritage inventory for the City of North York prior to amalgamation of the new City of Toronto in 1998 when it was absorbed into the city-wide Inventory of Heritage Properties.

³ Telegram, November 21, 1961

⁴ While the Underwriters' Survey Bureau produced atlases for North York (Volume 18) in the 20th century, none located in local collections cover this portion of Newtonbrook

⁵ Both Nicholls and Street are shown as local property owners on the 1878 Atlas (Image --)

⁶ While Nichols' subdivision was surveyed in Lot 24, Concession 1, east of Yonge Street, Robertson and his neighbours were assessed in Lot 23 (a search of land records indicates that Robertson did not own land in Lot 23)

⁷ According to archival records, Robertson had previously lived in Brant Township with his wife, Maggie and three daughters.

⁸ Robertson's daughter, Marguerite transferred the property to Marguerite Harkies Smith (no relation)

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Contemporary photographs of the Alexander Robertson House are found on the cover and in Sections 2 and 6 of this report. Its appearance reflects the transition in style after the turn of the 20th century when the exuberant designs identified with Victorian architecture gave way to the more restrained buildings of the Edwardian era. The Alexander Robertson House retains the L-shaped plan and dichromatic brickwork popularized by the Gothic Revival style of the 1800s, which is usual in a post-1900 dwelling.⁹ However, it is identified as an early 20th century dwelling by the reduced scale, oversized window opening on the north facade, and closed classical pediments on the gables.¹⁰ The form and roofline of the dwelling was popular in house plans after 1900 (Image 12) and, with its facades facing the street, side yard and backyard (under the cross gables), the type was described as "neither city nor country house (as) they represented a really new kind of dwelling, designed for a new suburban kind of place."¹¹

The Alexander Robertson House is particularly distinguished by its version of dichromatic or pattern brickwork, where "the familiar brick patterns of the 19th century have been reversed on all facades."¹² With its application of red brick detailing on buff brick walls, this was the opposite of the more common buff on red, which is illustrated on the Rueter House at 270 Drewry Avenue, the other surviving residential building with heritage status in Newtonbrook (Image 11).¹³ The pattern brickwork on the Alexander Robertson House is purportedly more common in western Ontario, but "owners who really wished to show off reversed the colours from what was usual in their region."¹⁴

The Alexander Robertson House rises 2½ stories on a L-shaped plan with a short wing on the west elevation. The structure is clad in buff brick with contrasting red brick applied for the quoins, window surrounds and verandah detailing. The cross-gable roof has a brick chimney on the east slope and pedimented gables with window openings on the north, west and south. The main entrance, placed in the left (east) bay on the north

⁹ According to Gowans (33), "Gothic per se was rare in post-Victorian buildings"

¹⁰ The Alexander Robertson House was completed a generation later than the neighbouring William Robinson House (demolished), which is shown in the archival photograph attached as Image 6. Robinson was identified in the assessment rolls as a builder, and his house shows the sprawling ell-shaped plan and open gables (usually dressed with bargeboards) typical of 19th century Gothic Revival dwellings

¹¹ Gowans, 33

¹² North York Inventory, 1996, 64

¹³ The North York Inventory (67) estimates the date of the Rueter House to the mid-1870s based on its architectural features, including the balloon frame that was not used in rural North York Township until the 1860s and 1870s

¹⁴ McIlwraith, 136. While less common in Toronto and area, this combination with buff surfaces and red detailing appeared as early as 1848 at "Oakham Hall", architect William Thomas's combined office and residence on Church Street, with the light-coloured walls intended to mimic more expensive stone finishes. While red brick in general was always more popular in this region than buff, the latter colour was readily available since the mid 1800s from brickyards in Toronto, East York, West Toronto Junction and Carlton, including the famed Don Valley Brickworks at Todmorden Mills (today's Evergreen Brickworks)

facade is covered by the enclosed verandah (which has been updated over time).¹⁵ An oversized flat-headed window opening is placed in the second storey and smaller versions are found on all elevations. A single-storey bay window projects from the west wing. The rear (south) addition and carport (east) are not identified as heritage attributes. The Alexander Robertson House is one of the few remaining early 20th century house form buildings in North York that is recognized as a heritage property.¹⁶

iv. CONTEXT

The location of the property at 65 Centre Avenue is shown on the property data map attached as Image 1. The Alexander Robertson House is placed on the south side of Centre Avenue, which runs east of Yonge Street, seven streets south of Steeles Avenue East in the Newtonbrook neighbourhood. The street contains a range of house form buildings, most of which are identified with the post-World War II suburban development of North York. With the Rueter House on Drewry Avenue, west of Yonge Street and the former general store at Yonge and Drewry, the Alexander Robertson House represents the evolution of Newtonbrook from a late 19th century farming hamlet to a 20th century residential suburb.

3. EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the Ontario Heritage Act: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. While the criteria are prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, the City of Toronto uses it when assessing properties for inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties. The evaluation table is marked “N/A” if the criterion is “not applicable” to the property or X if it is applicable, with explanatory text below.

Design or Physical Value	
i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	X
ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	X
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	N/A

Well Crafted Example of a Style and Type – The property at 65 Centre Avenue has cultural heritage value for its design as a well-crafted house form building from the World War I era in Newtonbrook whose appearance illustrates the transition from the decorated styles of the Victorian period to the more restrained classicism of the early 20th century. While the Alexander Robertson House displays the L-shaped plan, bay window and pattern brickwork from the 19th century Gothic Revival style, its scale and

¹⁶ Also dating to the World War I era, the John McKenzie House at 34 Parkview Avenue in Willowdale (but designed in the Edwardian Classical style) is designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act and serves as the headquarters of the Ontario Historical Society

pedimented gables identify its post-1900 design. The house form building is particularly distinguished by the two-tone pattern brickwork where red accents are applied to buff brick surfaces in a reversal of the typical colour combination.

Historical or Associative Value	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	N/A
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	X
iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	N/A

No associative values have been identified for the property at 65 Centre Avenue at the time of the research and writing of this report. The relationship of the Alexander Robertson House to the development of the Newtonbrook community is assessed as a contextual rather than a historical value.

Contextual Value	
i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	N/A
ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	X
iii. landmark	N/A

Surroundings – Contextually, the Alexander Robertson House is valued for its historical and visual relationship to Newtonbrook, the North York community that emerged along Yonge Street between Finch and Steeles Avenues in the mid 19th century. While the hamlet originated as a milling centre and provided services to local farmers, Newtonbrook became known as the location of the Humberstone Pottery and a number of carriage works in the late 19th century. After the first residential subdivision was introduced west of Yonge Street in the 1840s, it was followed in the next decade by William Nichols’ survey of “park and cottage lots” east of Yonge where the Alexander Robertson House was built in the World War I era. With the Newtonbrook Store (c.1907) and the Rueter House (c.1870) on Drewry Avenue, the property at 65 Centre Avenue is one of only three remaining sites linked to the development of Newtonbrook that is recognized on the City of Toronto’ heritage inventory. The Alexander Robertson House retains its cultural heritage integrity and demonstrates the evolution of Newtonbrook from a 19th century rural hamlet to a 20th century residential suburb reflecting the growth of North York.

4. SUMMARY

Following research and evaluation according to Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 65 Centre Avenue has design and contextual value as a highly-crafted early 20th century house form building that is set apart by its pattern brick detailing, architectural integrity and status as one of the few surviving heritage buildings in

Newtonbrook that reflects the evolution of the area from a cross-roads community to a residential suburb.

5. SOURCES

Archival Sources

Abstract Indices of Deeds, York Township, Concession 1E, Lots 23-24, and Plan 189, Lot 28
Aerial photographs, 1941-83, City of Toronto Archives
Archival Photographs, City of Toronto Archives and North York Historical Board (individual citations in Section 6)
Assessment Rolls, York Township, District 2, 1910-1915
Browne, Map of the Township of York, 1851
City of Toronto Directories, 1922-1980
Miles, Historical Atlas of the County of York, 1878

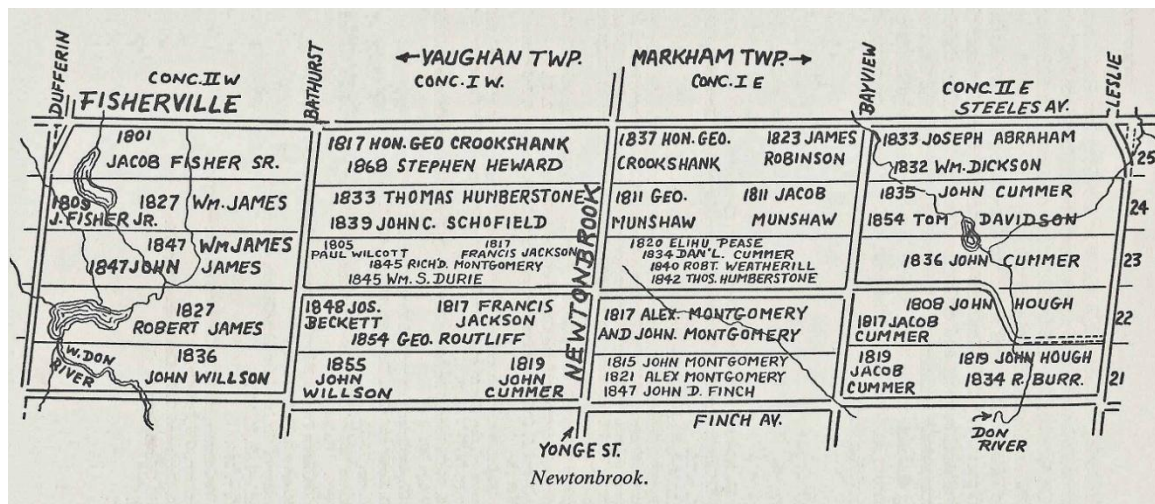
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Ritchie, T., "Notes on Dichromatic Brickwork in Ontario," APT Bulletin (Vol. XI, No. 2), 1979, 60-74
Robertson family records, www.ancestry.ca

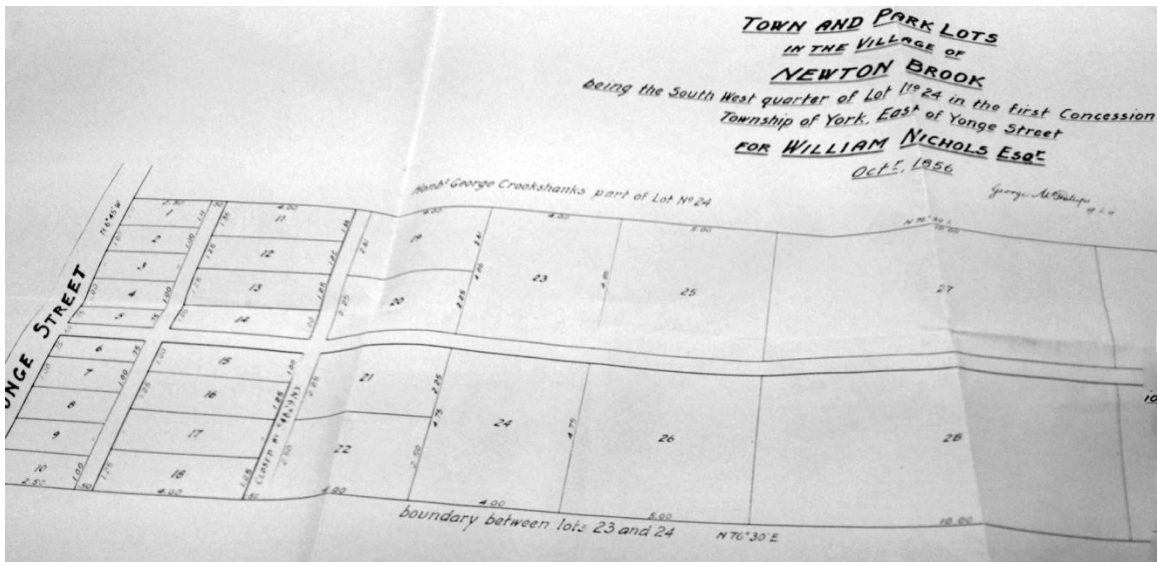
6. IMAGES - maps and atlases are followed by other images. On some images, arrows mark the location of the subject property



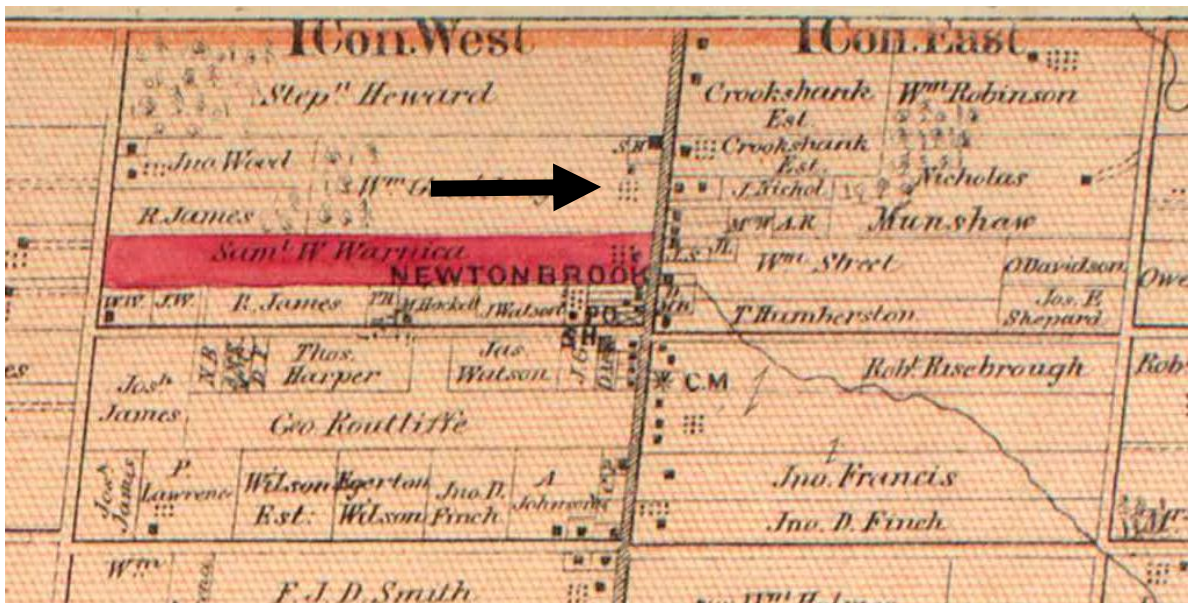
1. City of Toronto Property Data Map: showing **outlined in bold** the location of 65 Centre Street on the south side of the street, west of Willowdale Avenue in the Newtonbrook neighbourhood southeast of Yonge Street and Steeles Avenue East (7 streets to the north)



2. Newtonbrook: showing the division of farm lots in the community that developed along Yonge Street between Finch Avenue (south) and Steeles Avenue (north) (Hart, 178)



3. Plan 189, 1856: showing the small residential subdivision registered by James Nichol where the Alexander Robertson House was later built on part of Lot 28



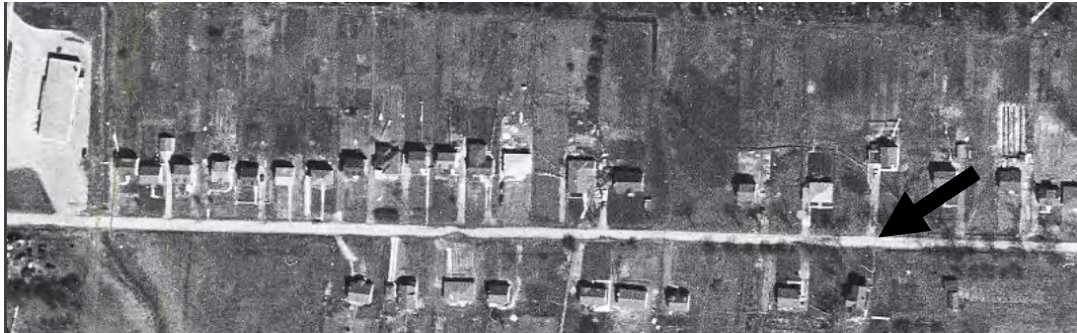
4. Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York, 1878: extract showing Nichol's subdivision in Newtonbrook



5. Archival Photograph, Robinson Farm, Newtonbrook, c.1913: showing the farmland north of the Centre Avenue during the same period the Alexander Robertson House was constructed (City of Toronto Archives, Series 372, Image 385)



6. Archival Photograph, Newtonbrook, c. 1922: looking south on Yonge Street and showing the community after the Alexander Robertson House was constructed to the east (the radial railway tracks are shown on the left) (City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1568, Item 508)



7. Aerial Photograph, 1947: showing an overview (above) and close-up (below) of Newtonbrook east of Yonge Street where part of Centre Avenue is developed adjoining the Alexander Robertson House (City of Toronto Archives)



8. Aerial Photographs, 1953 (above) and 1962 (below): showing the post-World War II development of the residential subdivision adjoining the Alexander Robertson House where open fields remain to the south (City of Toronto Archives)



9. Aerial Photographs, Centre Avenue, 1971 (above) and 1983 (below): showing the further infill along Centre Street (City of Toronto Archives)



10. Archival Photograph, Newtonbrook Store, 5926 Yonge Street, 1990: the former general store and post office (c. 1907) on the southwest corner of Drewry Avenue has been altered over time and is recognized on the City's heritage inventory as one of the few surviving buildings identified with the historic community of Newtonbrook (North York Historical Board)



11. Photograph, 273 Drewry Avenue, n.d.: The Rueter House (c. 1870 with additions) is recognized on the City's heritage inventory as a surviving house form building from Newtonbrook (<http://www.tobuilt.ca/php/tobuildings>)



12. Plan for a combined country and city home (Gowans, 184)



13. Archival Photographs, 65 Centre Avenue (pre-1990): showing the principal (north) elevation of the Alexander Robertson House on Centre Avenue (above) and the rear (south) wall (below) (North York Historical Board)



14. Archival Photographs, 65 Centre Avenue, May 1990: showing the north (above) and east (below) of the Alexander Robertson House (Heritage Section, City of North York)



15. Current Photographs: showing the north (left) and west (right) walls of the Alexander Robertson House (above) and the placement and setback of the building on the south side of Centre Avenue (below) (Heritage Preservation Services, 2013)