

REVISED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:
131 FARNHAM AVENUE
(REVISED (JULY 2016) REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)

De La Salle College "Oaklands" (previously known as Oaklands)

Description

De La Salle College "Oaklands" is situated on the east side of Avenue Road between Oaklands Avenue and Farnham Avenue. The property is a secondary school campus (including a historic house and estate) situated on the Lake Iroquois escarpment which runs east-west through the property. On top of the ridge to the north is the upper campus with planted open space surrounded by the original Macdonald family house, known as Oaklands (1859 onwards), and a series of more recent school buildings including the 1949 De La Salle College "Oaklands" building. To the south is the escarpment face leading down to the sports fields including a running track and football pitch as well as the historic gates (1860s) and gatekeeper's house (1908) at the north-east corner of Avenue Road and Oaklands Avenue.

The property at 131 Farnham Avenue was designated in 1977 under By-Law 10-77 under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

De La Salle College "Oaklands" campus is an important cultural heritage property in the City of Toronto that has design, associative and contextual values.

De La Salle College "Oaklands" originated as the Oaklands estate, which dates to the late 1850s with the purchase of three lots of land on the east side of Avenue Road and the construction of Oaklands house (1859-60 and onwards) which has had a continuous prominence as a landmark on the ridge ever since.

The property has historical value for its associations with important historical figures and institutions of local, national and international significance.

Originally the estate of John Macdonald (1824-1890), who built Oaklands house (1859-60) and later extended it (1869-70) on Toronto's escarpment. A prominent innovative businessman, Methodist preacher, philanthropist and politician who was elected to both the provincial and federal parliaments, Macdonald was ultimately appointed to the Senate by Sir John A. Macdonald.

Oaklands is also valued for its association with Mary Virginia McCormick (1861-1941), the daughter, of Cyrus H. McCormick (1809-1994), the internationally-lauded inventor of labour-saving farm machinery, known as the mechanical reaper, and founder of the Cyrus H. McCormick and Brothers company which later merged with J. P. Morgan to become the International Harvester Company now known as the Navistar International Corporation. Mary McCormick was also a noted philanthropist both in the United States and Canada, contributing funds for the creation of the Mary McCormick Recreation Centre and Park in Brockton. During her occupation of Oaklands she extended the

house, added the gatekeeper's house and modified the landscaping and circuitous driveway.

Oaklands is valued for its association with Jean-Baptiste de la Salle who founded the Christian Brothers in Reims, France in 1680. The Brothers operate educational institutions, named for De La Salle around the world. They first opened a Canadian branch in Montreal in 1837 and followed in Toronto in 1851 where they have had a continuous presence in the city as a Catholic educational institution, creating De La Salle College "Oaklands" in 1931.

Finally the property is valued for its association with a series of important Toronto architects: William Hay and his succeeding firm of Gundry and Langley, the firms of Darling and Pearson, Gordon and Helliwell and James H. Haffa.

The property's design value relates to the house and its surroundings as one of the only two surviving Victorian houses constructed on the Lake Iroquois escarpment, which retains the essential features of its original landscape setting. Oaklands is valued as one of the finest examples of High Victorian Gothic Revival residential architecture, the "Victorian house, par excellence."¹ Built in 1859-60 and extended in 1869-70 with buff brick with stone details it is an excellent example of the High Victorian Gothic Revival style. This is evident in the asymmetrical plan and picturesque massing of the exterior which combines steeply pitched gable roofs and dormers, oriel and bay windows, and three octagonal towers. The variety of details are typical of the style and include polychromatic slate roofs, elaborate weathervanes, decorative wood bargeboards with kingposts or metal finials, crenellated parapet. The stone gates (c1860s) with their octagonal piers, decorated with quatrefoil motifs in relief, and the iron railings with their trefoil motifs extended the design value to the original entry of the property.

Later additions to the house built during Mary McCormick's occupation of the property (c1912), contribute to design value in the well-crafted features such as the stone porte-cochere on the north side and single-storey bay window extensions on the south side, which replaced the earlier verandahs, but maintain the High Victorian Gothic Revival details and picturesque rambling character of the house. Many of the identified interior areas and features, such as the fireplaces and the door cases reflect the influence of Neo-Classicism after the turn of the century. The result is a unique work which is a rare stylistic combination of evolving architectural style over 60 years that seeks to create a unified whole respecting the original house.

The gatekeeper's cottage (c1908), also built during Mary McCormick's residency, with its stucco walls, steep sloping roofs punctuated by dormers and extending to incorporate an asymmetrical verandah has a compatible picturesque style with a rustic Classical quality evident in the Doric columns and arched verandah walls that contributes to the design value in exemplifying Edwardian eclecticism.

Design value is also evident in the setting of the Oaklands house on the edge of the wooded escarpment, originally reached by a winding, still partially extant drive, which ascended across the lower open fields to the upper level of the ridge and exemplifies

¹ Arthur Eric, *Toronto: No Mean City*, 1964, ill.233.

the more rustic aspects of the Picturesque aesthetic which converged with the High Victorian Gothic Revival. The escarpment driveway retaining walls with their stone arcades of pointed Gothic arches (c1912) are also identified for their design value.

Under the new ownership of the Christian Brothers in 1931, and a shift in purpose from a single family home to an educational/collective-residential function, the whole property was re-imagined with a collection of school buildings, including the historic Oaklands house, carefully composed around the edge of the central gardens of the dell on the upper terrace at the top of the ridge, with the fields of the open space below devoted primarily to athletic activities. Despite the change of use, the re-development of the site reinforced the physical and design value of the original domestic setting. The upper terrace of gardens with the dell, the original oak trees, additional maple trees planted during the Macdonald family's occupation and their enclosure on three sides (north, east and south) by the house and De La Salle College, with the open west side which permits views across the open space from Avenue Road to the house, the college and the gardens, are also identified for their physical and design value.

The De La Salle College "Oaklands" building (1949) is identified as having cultural heritage value through its design which represents a mid-twentieth century Neo-Classical style as a two-and-a-half storey, flat-roofed building with a central cupola topped with a conical copper roof and cross, clad in variegated red brick with Neo-Classical stone pilasters and entablatures framing the central entrance and two side wings of the chapel and auditorium, with stone relief panels and other details. The incorporation of glass block and the inclusion of contemporary subjects in the relief panels and the varied treatment of Neo-Classical elements to accommodate the school's functions are modern elements indicating the influence of the mid-twentieth century on the building's design.

The contextual value of the property relates to the historical, visual, physical and functional links between Oaklands and its grounds and the Yonge-St. Clair and Casa Loma neighborhoods. With the house positioned on the edge of the Lake Iroquois escarpment facing south to the city, Oaklands and its setting are valued for maintaining the 19th century character of the escarpment in this area. This character originated with the sequence of estates built along the ridge from as far west as Wychwood Park, west of Bathurst Street, to Oaklands in the east. Of these nineteenth century estates, only Spadina and Oaklands have survived and maintain their distinctive escarpment setting. Situated on the east side of Avenue Road, Oaklands is contextually valued for providing the most publically visible remnant of this 19th century development pattern on the escarpment.

De La Salle College "Oaklands" is a landmark sitting on the ridge of Avenue Road which with University Avenue is one of the city's main north-south routes. The property is part of a sequence of nineteenth century landmarks viewed on this route which are important institutions including the Ontario Legislature, and the University of Toronto to the south and Upper Canada College in the north.

Beyond the significance of 19th century settlement and history of Toronto, the contextual value of the property also lies with the visibility of the escarpment from Avenue Road and Oaklands Avenue. The escarpment is part of the Lake Iroquois

Shoreline Ridge formed approximately 12,000 – 13,000 years ago and recognized as a feature in the City's Natural Heritage System as identified on Map 9 of the Official Plan. "The Iroquois Shoreline Ridge clearly represents one of the city's most important cultural and natural heritage features on account of its archaeological, geological, Aboriginal, city-historic and built heritage associations, as well as its physical prominence."² The City of Toronto's Archaeological Master Plan has identified the ridge including the De La Salle property as having archaeological potential. The natural heritage features include the prominence of red and white oaks, maple and pine trees on the site. As a link between the Humber River and Don Valley, the ridge fostered an east-west trail used by aboriginal people which survives today as Davenport Road.

The views from Avenue Road across the school's open fields have been identified as providing some of the best views of the escarpment in the City.³ The view from the gates on Oaklands Avenue is significant both for its view of the escarpment as well as preserving the view of Oaklands framed by the gates which was established between 1899 and 1903.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of Oaklands and the Oaklands estate on the property at 131 Farnham Avenue are:

Oaklands (exterior)

- The placement, setback and orientation of Oaklands in its original location on the edge of the escarpment with one principal elevation facing south looking over the landscape of the escarpment and the playing fields to the city skyline and the other one facing north to formal gardens
- The scale, form and massing of the house-form building, with the irregular plan including three towers, a variety of windows, bay windows, dormers and gable roofs and chimneys
- The two-coloured slate bands on the tower roofs
- The buff brick and stone materials, the wood windows and bargeboards with king-posts and the metal finials and weather vane

North Elevation

- The north elevation includes the main building with a service wing on the east
- The main building is composed of a five storey tower set between two, two-and-a-half storey gable-roofed wings and an additional hipped roof section to the east
- The tower has a square plan at the first three levels which becomes octagonal at the upper two. It features a three-sided oriel window with pointed-head openings at the third level, at the fourth level triangular cusped windows with stone drip moulds terminating in carved bosses. Above bands of decorative wood corbelling provide a transition to the slate roof which has dormers on four sides with tiny metal finials and is capped with an elaborate metal weather vane

² Stewart, Andrew, "Review of the Significance of the Iroquois Shoreline Ridge (City of Toronto) and Recommendations for Protection," 2015 p 3.

³ Stewart, *op cit.*, p 1.

- The gable-roofed wing to the west of the tower has a two-storey bay window with a hipped roof and stone surrounds at the window openings
- The stone porte-cochere, added c1912, has engaged columns and flattened arches with Gothic cusps and a stone balustrade of pointed arches on its roof.
- The main doorway has a paneled, wooden door case with multi-paned sidelights and transom
- To the east of the tower, a single storey bay window with stone surrounds with a stone balustrade of pointed arches matching that of the porte-cochere.
- The east wing on the north elevation includes 3 gable roofed wings with decorative bargeboards with 2 patterns that are distinct from those of the main house and the smallest of the three towers
- The remaining windows on the north elevation are a combination of flat-headed with stone surrounds or lintel, or they feature brick arches in-filled with stone relief panels carved with quatrefoils. Third storey windows in the gables feature round heads. The second storey windows in the kitchen wing tower feature slender lancet shaped windows
- Three chimneys project from the roof of the main building, three more project from the kitchen wing

West Elevation

- A gable roofed bay at the south-west corner with a two-storey rectangular bay window with stone surrounds around the windows, a decorative word bargeboard with quatrefoil motifs and a large king-post finial
- At the north end of the west elevation a single-storey rectangular bay window features a crenellated parapet with the Macdonald family crest
- Two dormer windows with deep wooden hoods and a large chimney feature in the roof

South Elevation

- The south elevation includes the original house, 1859-60 at the centre, two-and-a-half story extensions to the west and two-storey extensions to the east dating from 1869-70. At the ground floor are a series of bay windows dating from c1912
- At the western end a gable roof with two dormers which are extensions of the south brick face and feature bargeboards and metal finials
- At the ground floor below a large bay window extension with diagonal corners, features stone window surrounds and an upper balcony with a wooden pointed-arch balustrade
- At the centre of the elevation, a projecting gable wing features a bargeboard with a king-post finial, a hexagonal second-floor bay window with stone headers and sills, a round-headed window at the third floor with a metal balustrade featuring thistles and quatrefoils. At the ground an oval bay window with stone surrounds
- To the east, a large bay window with diagonal corners and stone headers, with a balcony above. Facing the balcony are two windows, two over two sash with stone headers. Above is a narrow dormer with a deep wooden hood
- The 1859-60 octagonal tower emerges at the second story level between this bay window and the next one to the east. The tower has flat headed windows at the second level and round-headed windows above with what appears to be black-

painted pointed arches on the brick above the windows. The roof features polychromatic shingles

- The east bay window extension dating to c1912 supporting an upper level sunroom which is glazed on three sides
- The south façade of the kitchen wing of 1869-70 with a gable dormer whose barge-board matches those on the north elevation

Oaklands Interior

- The important areas are situated on the first and second floor, additional descriptions have been added as the uses have changed. These areas are the Main Entrance and Vestibule, the Chapel (south-west corner room), the Boardroom (north-west corner room), the Office (with oval bay window), the Sitting Room (not identified in 1995 HEA), the Dining Room (currently an office), the Entrance Hall with staircase, a second-storey Sitting Room, the second-storey Sun Room and the second-storey stairwell to the third floor.

First Storey

- Main Entrance and Vestibule with wooden doors with glazing and multi-paned sidelights and transoms
- The Main Foyer with two door cases with classical surrounds featuring fluted pilasters, neo-classical mouldings and a dentilated cornice
- The Chapel (south-west corner room) with marble fireplace, flanked by two single doorways with classical surrounds and cornices, and a dentilated cornice around the entire room, as well as fluted Corinthian pilasters and columns supporting the beam between the main room and the bay windows
- The Board Room (north-west corner) with a dentilated cornice and frieze with Neo-Classical mouldings which continues on all elevations of the room as well as the two-colour marble fireplace surround with Neo-Classical decorative relief panels and mouldings
- The Office (south) with the oval bay window framed by wood paneling and the multi-paned double doors framed by an ornamented wood surround and its fire place with wood and stone surround
- Sitting Room (south) with white marble fireplace with elaborately detailed carving featuring three richly carved corbel pendants, at the sides and centre of the fireplace surround, spiral roll moulds around the arched opening and carved discs in the spandrel panels to either side of the arch and a mantel shelf with an undulating edge profile
- The Dining Room contains wooden wall paneling, elongated trefoil transoms and wooden ceiling beams and its fireplace of brick with stone corbels and wood mantel
- Entrance Hall with wood paneling, wooden door surrounds with Neo-Classical detailing and quarter-turn staircase with carved balustrade and newel post with caps, landing and window with its leaded glass window of five lights with transoms above with stained glass detailing

Second Storey

- The second storey Sitting Room contains a marble fireplace with an arched marble surround, keystone incised detailing and a bowed mantelpiece

- Fireplace on the second storey level with a marble surround featuring an arch with a keystone similar to but different from that identified above
- Fireplace in the second storey Sun Room with marble and wood surround ornamented by egg and dart moulding, scroll detailing, paneled frieze and a dentilated cornice
- Second storey stairwell contains a two-turn staircase with an open well, twisted balusters and carved tread brackets

Stone Gates

- Situated in their current location at the exact distance from the north-east corner of Avenue Road and Oaklands Avenue, 8 stone gate posts with domed tops, two with buttresses and all with incised quatrefoil motifs creating a pedestrian entrance at the west and a vehicular entry on the right. The iron fence includes trefoils motifs at its base

Gatekeeper's House

- Situated in its exact location and set back from the north-east corner of Oaklands Avenue and Avenue Road
- Including a one-and-a-half storey stucco-clad structure on a raised brick basement with a projecting verandah on the east face and three dormer windows, one cut into the eaves on the east face
- Elements include the verandah walls with the arched openings at both ends, and the Doric columns on the verandah

De La Salle College "Oaklands", 1949 (exterior)

- Two-and-a-half storey, variegated red brick-clad building with a flat roof topped with a cupola with a conical copper roof supporting a cross
- The west façade with its symmetrical projecting bays at either end and central entry bay, all featuring full-height fluted stone pilasters with classical capitals supporting a stone entablature
- The central entrance bay features the main entrance door with a large stone surround with classical pilasters and entablature and large broken pediment with curved volutes flanking
- The southern entry bay of the auditorium features stone pilasters and entablature with three sets of doors between the pilasters with window openings at the second floor with stone surrounds and a dentilated cornice. In the attic level, carved relief panels featuring a central panel with a cartouche flanked by horns of plenty all featuring fruits and flowers. To the south, an octagonal panel featuring a drum and bugle and to the north a panel with a running football player almost at the goalposts. At the outer edges in two recessed flanking walls, two long narrow window openings are filled with glass blocks
- The north projection is the exterior face of the chapel and features a sloping stone pediment with a cross at the centre supported on two pairs of stone pilasters with fluted capitals. Between them, the window of the chapel featuring a Palladian pattern with a larger central bay and two smaller bays with glass block windows. Above, two stone relief panels featuring crests

Oaklands estate: views and landscape features

- The retaining walls of the driveway with their arcaded balustrades and the arched opening below the driveway
- The views from Avenue Road of the ridge, the playing field and the south elevations of Oaklands
- The view from Oaklands Avenue, through the gates and across the open field of the ridge and the south elevation of Oaklands
- The view from the ridge looking south towards the downtown and the lake
- The landscape of the ridge including trees, vegetation, paths and slope falling between the top of the bank and the toe of the slope
- The open space with trees and plantings at the upper terrace on the north side of Oaklands and the location of the buildings framing and partially enclosing the open space while keeping it open to views from Avenue Road of the west elevation of the 1949 school building and the north and west elevations of Oakland house
- The curving driveway on the north side of Oaklands that contains an open grassed and planted area with a dell known as "The Dish"