

Intention to Designate under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act – 170 Merton Street

Date: September 18, 2017

To: Toronto Preservation Board

Toronto and East York Community Council

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director

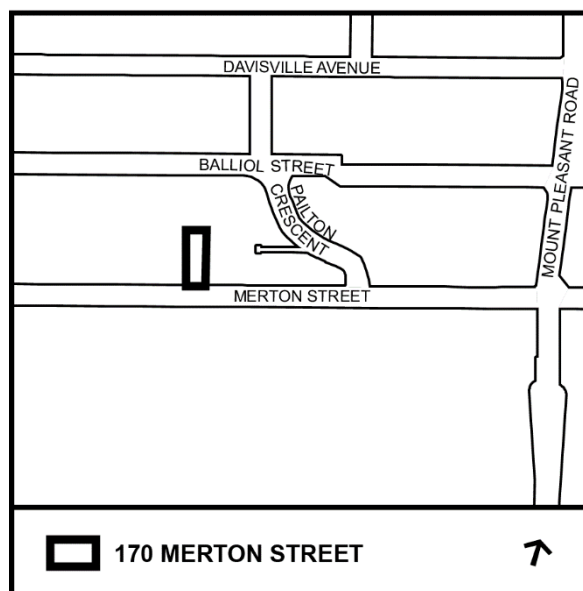
Wards: Ward 22 - St. Paul's

SUMMARY

This report recommends that Toronto City Council state its intention to designate the property at 170 Merton Street under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act and include the property on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register.

The property located on the north side of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Pailton Crescent, in the Davisville neighbourhood contains a two-and-half storey, office building completed in 1969 for the Visiting Homemakers Association and designed by the architect Leslie Rebanks in a Late Modernist style.

Following research and evaluation, it has been determined that the property at 170 Merton Street meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its design, associative and contextual value.



Properties on the Heritage Register will be conserved and maintained in accordance with Official Plan Heritage Policies. Designation enables City Council to review alterations to the site, enforce heritage property standards and maintenance, and refuse demolition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, recommends that:

1. City Council include the property at 170 Merton Street on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register.
2. City Council state its intention to designate the property at 170 Merton Street under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, in accordance with the Statement of Significance: 170 Merton Street (Reasons for Designation) attached as Attachment 3 to the report (September 18, 2017) from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division.
3. If there are no objections to the designation in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act, City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the necessary bill in Council.
4. If there are objections in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act, City Council direct the City Clerk to refer the designation to the Conservation Review Board.
5. 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.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

On July 21, 2012, City Council established the Midtown Planning Group to create a proactive and comprehensive strategy for planning initiatives in the Yonge-Eglinton area. The Midtown Planning Group consists of the three local councillors for Wards 16, 22 and 25, representatives of local residents' associations and Business Improvement Areas, local citizens and City staff from North York and Toronto and East York Districts. A map showing the Midtown in Focus Study Area is attached (Attachment 1).

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.PG16.17>

At its meeting of July 12, 2016, City Council adopted PG13.1 "Midtown in Focus: Growth, Built Form and Infrastructure Review - Status Report" including the findings and emerging directions of the first phase of the review.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.PG13.1>

COMMENTS

Midtown in Focus: Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment (CHRA)

Midtown in Focus, an inter-divisional initiative led by City Planning, is a response to the rapid intensification and change underway in parts of the Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan area. The study seeks to ensure that growth positively contributes to the vitality and quality of life in one of Toronto's most dynamic neighbourhoods.

In September 2015, City staff along with its consultants Taylor Hazel Architects and Timmins Martelle Heritage Consultants, initiated the CHRA, a comprehensive assessment and documentation of cultural heritage resources, including built heritage, cultural heritage landscapes and archaeological resources, in the Apartment Neighbourhoods and Mixed-Use Areas within the Midtown in Focus Study Area.

The CHRA is informing the development of planning policies and guidelines for the Midtown planning area and it provides data and analysis to support the inclusion of heritage properties on the City's Heritage Register. It includes a historical overview for Midtown, provides a Stage I archaeological assessment and, applying provincial criteria, identifies potential cultural heritage resources for the Heritage Register, including individual properties, Heritage Conservation Districts, and Cultural Heritage Landscapes.

The CHRA was completed in April 2017. The CHRA identified the former Visiting Homemakers Association building at 170 Merton Street as being of cultural heritage value or interest. City Staff conducted further analysis subsequent to a demolition application being filed with Toronto Building and the results are described in this report

A location map (Attachment 1) and photographs (Attachment 2) are attached. Staff have completed the Research and Evaluation Report (Attachment 4) for the property at 170 Merton Street and determined that the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act under all three categories of design, associative and contextual values.

Constructed in 1969, the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building has design value as a representative example of a distinctive Late Modern style office building designed as the headquarters for the VHA featuring octagonal towers and bays, ribbon windows, concrete brick with distinctive interlocking corners and an integrated exterior space with landscaping. The property has value as it is the first purpose-built headquarters for the VHA, an important social-welfare agency founded in Toronto in 1925. Designed by the Toronto-based architect Leslie Rebanks, the building is also valued for its association with the W. Garfield Weston Foundation which donated the funds for the property and the building and dedicated it to the memory of Mrs. Reta Weston. The property has contextual value as it contributes to the post-war character of distinctively-designed, low-rise residential, commercial and social agency buildings which transformed Merton Street from its Victorian industrial beginnings following the completion of the Yonge Street subway line in 1954.

The Statement of Significance (Attachment 3) for 170 Merton Street 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 Ontario Heritage Trust to the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

CONTACT

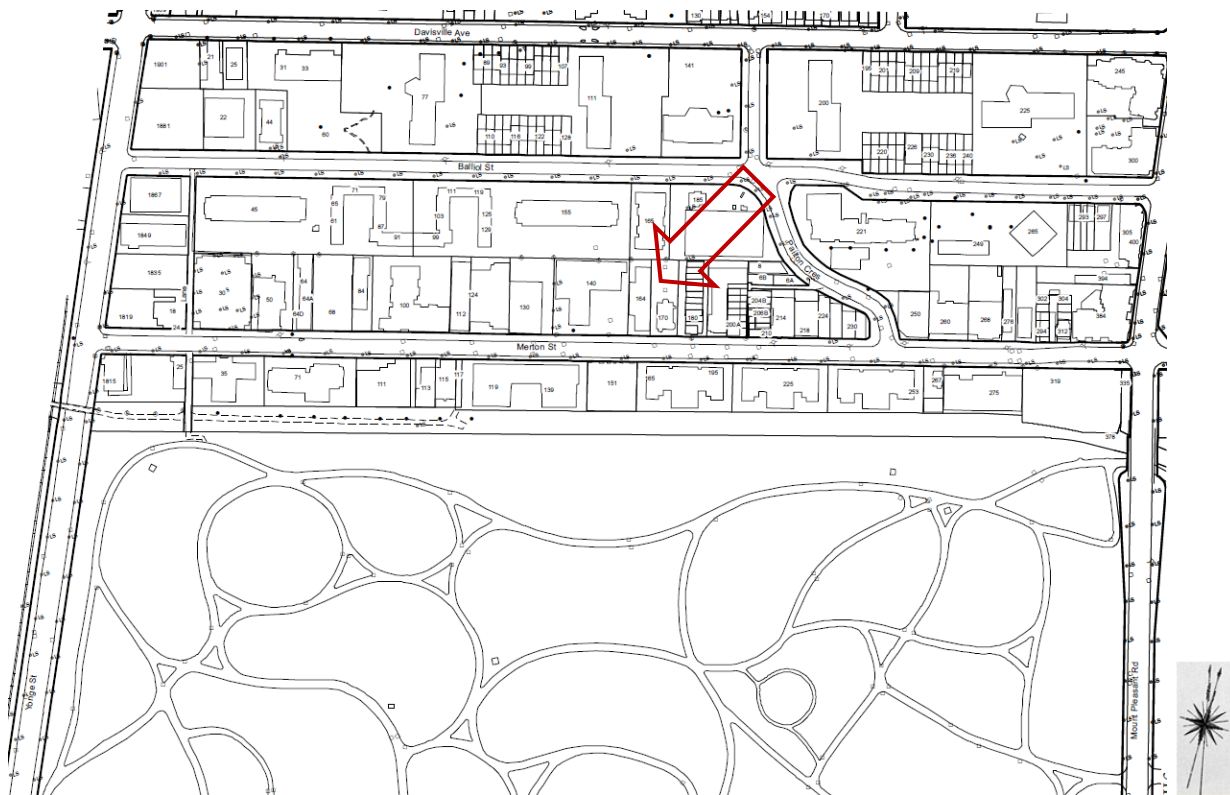
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SIGNATURE

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Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning Division

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment No. 1 – Location Map
Attachment No. 2 – Photographs
Attachment No. 3 – Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation)
170 Merton Street
Attachment No. 4 – Heritage Property Research and Evaluation Report



This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundaries of the properties are not shown. The arrow marks the site of the property at 170 Merton Street on the north side of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Mount Pleasant Road.



Photograph of the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building, currently occupied by Cresford Developments, 170 Merton Street, principal (south) and side (west) elevations (Heritage Preservation Services (HPS), 2017)



Early photograph of the VHA building showing the original pigment of the concrete brick cladding and paving (Leslie Rebanks)



Photograph of the VHA building, principal (south) and side (east) elevations (HPS, 2017)



Early photograph of the VHA building, showing the principal (south) and side (east) elevations with original pigmented concrete brick (Leslie Rebanks)

170 MERTON STREET
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)

ATTACHMENT 3

The property at 170 Merton Street (the former Visiting Homemakers Association) is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the provincial criteria prescribed for municipal designation under all three categories of design, associative and contextual value.

Description

The property at 170 Merton Street contains the former Visiting Homemakers Association building designed by Leslie Rebanks and constructed in 1969 as a two-and-a-half storey office building with brick cladding. An elevator was added on the east elevation in 1995.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The former Visiting Homemakers Association headquarters building has design value as a distinctive representative of the post-war style known as Late Modernism. A high degree of artistic merit and craftsmanship is evident in the castle-like massing of the building including the octagonal towers and bays, the integration of a terrace space within the complex and the use of concrete brick and mortar (originally pigmented a dark grey) with expressed corner joints combined with 'ribbon windows.'

The building has associative value as the first purpose-built headquarters for the Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA), a Toronto-based social welfare agency which was founded in 1925 by Barbara Blackstock providing care to disadvantaged families, the sick, the elderly, and people living with intellectual disability and homelessness while also undertaking research and reporting on the co-relation between low wages, poverty and health. The VHA occupied the building for 40 years until 2010. The building has associative value as a formative work in the career of the Toronto-based architect Leslie Rebanks, a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and an elected member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, known for his award winning and critically-acclaimed projects for Wittington Properties Ltd. and Loblaws. The building also has value for its association with the W. Garfield Weston Foundation who donated the building and the property to the VHA dedicating it to the memory of Mrs. W. Garfield (Reta) Weston in 1970.

Contextually, the VHA headquarters building is important in defining and maintaining the mid-twentieth century character of Merton Street which, following the completion of the Yonge Subway line in 1954 and the local Davisville station, saw the transformation of the street from a late 19th-century road characterized by industrial buildings and Victorian semi-detached dwellings and row houses to a dense urban street of low-rise residential and commercial buildings with a variety of distinctive designs. The introduction of health and social welfare agencies, including the Girl Guides and War Amps as well as the VHA which had specially-designed headquarters, contributes to the distinctive post-war, architectural character of the street.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the former Visiting Homemakers Association are:

- The setback, placement and orientation of the building on the north side of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Pailton Crescent
- The scale, form and massing of the two-and-a-half storey office building with its octagonal towers on the south, west and north elevations
- On the principal (south) elevation, the octagonal one-and-a-half storey bay and the raised terrace and staircase on the south elevation and the projecting roof overhang
- The principal (south) elevation and two side elevations facing east and west with their concrete brick cladding
- The interlocking detail of the bricks at the corners of the towers and bays
- The arrangement of openings on the principal (south) elevation which includes, at the first floor, the recessed entrance, the ribbon windows at the second level and the corner windows at the south-west corner at the basement, first and second floor levels
- The arrangement of openings on the side elevations (west and east) with the bands of ribbon windows
- The black metal frames of the ribbon windows with their vertically proportioned openings

The following are not included as heritage attributes:

The 1995 elevator tower on the east elevation

HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT



VISITING HOMEMAKERS ASSOCIATION
170 MERTON STREET

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services
City Planning Division
City of Toronto

September 2017

1. DESCRIPTION



Above: 170 Merton Street, with its principal (south) and side (west) elevations (Heritage Preservation Services [HPS], 2017)

Cover: 170 Merton Street with its principal (south) elevation showing an early photograph of the building with the original pigment of the concrete brick (Leslie Rebanks)

170 Merton Street - Visiting Homemakers Association	
ADDRESS	170 Merton Street
WARD	Ward 22 (St. Paul's)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	PLAN M5 PT LOTS 30 AND 32 RP 66R3922 PART 1
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Davisville
HISTORICAL NAME	Visiting Homemakers Association Headquarters
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1969
ORIGINAL OWNER	Visiting Homemakers Association
ORIGINAL USE	Headquarters and training facility
CURRENT USE*	Office Building
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	Leslie Rebanks
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	Concrete brick cladding steel and concrete structure
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	Late Modern
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	Elevator Addition 1995
CRITERIA	Design, Associative and Contextual
HERITAGE STATUS	n/a
RECORDER	Heritage Preservation Services: Marybeth McTeague
REPORT DATE	September 2017

2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 170 Merton Street, and applies the evaluation criteria which determine that it merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Key Date	Historical Event
1845	John Davis purchases part of Lot 18 in the Third Concession of York Township which becomes the Davisville neighbourhood
1885-90	Joseph Stanley Davis subdivides the southern half of Lot 18 with Plan M5 which includes the creation of Merton and Balliol Streets
1889	The Belt Line is constructed running along the southern edge of the Merton Street properties encouraging the location of industry on the south side of the street
1890	Davisville and Eglinton merge to become the Town of North Toronto
1925	The Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) is founded by Miss Barbara Blackstock
1964	A member of the VHA Board, Ruth Dean approaches W. Garfield Weston requesting financial support for the provision of enlarged training and administrative space
1967	The W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation trustees approve donations to the VHA of \$250,000 to construct a new headquarters building and an additional \$100,000 to purchase the property at 170 Merton Street
1968	The VHA purchases the property at 170 Merton Street and a building permit application is made to construct a two-storey office building designed by the architect Leslie Rebanks on the property (File No. 3333, Permit A413)
1969	In November the VHA moves into the new headquarters at 170 Merton Street
1970	The W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation formally presented the new headquarters building and the property to the VHA, dedicating the building to the memory of Mrs. Reta Weston
1995	A permit application is submitted to construct an elevator shaft for universal access
2002	The VHA changes their name to VHA Home HealthCare
2010	The VHA sells the property to Cresford Developments
2017	April: As part of the Midtown in Focus study, the Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment identified the property at 170 Merton Street as "being of cultural heritage value or interest."
2017	July: A site-plan application is submitted to redevelop the property with an 11-unit townhouse block.

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Davisville Neighbourhood, North Toronto

The property at 170 Merton Street is located in the Davisville neighbourhood, centred on the intersection of Yonge Street and Davisville Avenue. (Image 1) Originally known as Davis Corners, the neighbourhood originated with the arrival in the City of Toronto of an immigrant English school teacher, John Davis (1813-1899) in 1840. Davis was "a very active man with a strong social conscience."¹ Trained as a school teacher, he worked as bookkeeper and then in 1845 purchased a portion of Lot 18, Third Concession on the east side of Yonge Street. He became a potter and took over John Walmsley's pottery business renaming it the Davis Pottery.² By 1851 Davis had established the Davisville Methodist Church, he became the Post Master for the local post office and in 1860 donated land for York County School Section 7 serving as a trustee for 25 years. (Image 2) .One of Davis's sons, Joseph Stanley, became the mayor of North Toronto also serving as a councillor. Davis's grandson, J. J. Davis opened a grocery store at the north-east corner of Yonge Street and Davisville Avenue, where it currently survives as a Starbucks. (Image 3)

In 1889 Davisville and Eglinton were incorporated as the Village of North Toronto which became a town in 1890. North Toronto extended as far south as the upper border of the Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Joseph Stanley Davis owned the property, half of Lot 18, which extended along the cemetery border between Yonge Street and Mount Pleasant Avenue. By 1890, he had subdivided it under Plan M creating two streets leading east from Yonge Street and named Balliol and Merton, apparently after the Oxford Colleges.³ (Image 4)

The introduction of the Belt Line Railway which the Grand Trunk/CN railway used meant that Merton Street was an ideal location for businesses. The Davisville Pottery relocated to 377 Merton Street. Other businesses including Milnes Coal, and the Dominion Coal and Wood Company were also located on Merton Street on the south side, near the railway line, while the north side was developed with housing. (Images 5-6) A reminder of that period of industries on the south side of Merton near the railway line and Victorian housing on both the north and south sides, sometimes with a workshop behind still exists at Paul's Collision, 267 Merton Street. (Image 7)

With the completion of the Toronto Transit Commission Yonge Street Subway line in 1954, the Davisville neighbourhood became accessible prompting the redevelopment of the street with a series of low-rise, two-three storey commercial and apartment buildings were created and in the 1960s and 1970s. Health, social welfare and charitable institutions and agencies also located in Davisville including the Toronto School for the Deaf located at 43 Millwood Road, north of Davisville Road as well as the Girl Guides and War Amps headquarters buildings located at 50 and 140 Merton Street (respectively) to the west of the VHA at 170 Merton Street. Other health and social welfare agencies including the Geneva Centre for Autism (112, 164 and 224 Merton), Moorelands Community Services (250 Merton Street), The Theresa Group (124 Merton

1 Ritchie, p.74.

2 It would be known as the Davisville Pottery by the 1880s.

3 Ritchie, p. 71.

Street) have followed. The Hospital Workers Housing Co-Op is located at 100 Merton Street. The post-war development has been succeeded by mid-rise housing complexes combining town houses and apartment blocks and more recently a high-rise condominium tower has been added at the south-east corner of Yonge and Merton Street.

The Visiting Homemakers Association

The Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA), now known as VHA Home HealthCare is a not-for-profit, Toronto-based agency which was founded in 1925 by Barbara Blackstock.⁴ Initially the agency focused on assisting families where the mother was ill, incapacitated or deceased. Through the following decades the agency focused on low income families unable to purchase home support and expanded their services to include assisting parents of children with polio, supporting families during the war and families with a working single parent with a critically ill child. By the 1950s a study was undertaken to assist the elderly so that they could continue living in their homes. Services expanded further to provide care to patients before and after hospitalization and to support families with a physically handicapped parent.

From the 1930s the agency also became a source of research and reporting on the poverty in the city, on the effectiveness of certain wage levels to provide adequate housing and nutrition for families and on the impact of lack of nutrition and adequate heat on health. Nutrition classes were offered at local YMCA/YWCA's. A 1939 report in the Toronto Daily Star noted that the VHA was a non-sectarian agency, and its services would be supplied to all families who need it, regardless of race, creed, color or nationality.⁵ The agency was also supported by various fund-raising auxiliary groups who hosted events and gathered donated supplies to assist.

In 1980, the VHA's Executive Director became the first President of the newly incorporated Canadian Council on Homemaker Services.⁶ The service provided Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses so that more medical procedures could be provided at home. The VHA is an accredited member of the Registered Nurse Association of Ontario. In 2000 they initiated their Extreme Cleaning Program, to assist people suffering from mental health challenges to avoid eviction. In 2001-2 the VHA changed their name to VHA Home HealthCare. Their team now includes nurses, occupational therapists, personal support workers, home workers, cleaners, social workers, dietitians and speech pathologists. They own and operate Adams House, which provides housing for people with severe mental illness who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.

When the VHA started in 1925, the Red Cross provided them with a building for their operations and some financial assistance. For the next 40 years various properties were leased and funding was received from donations. Eventually in 1958, funding was allocated by the Federal government and provincial legislation also ensured the provision of funding to municipalities to support homecare agencies. In 1964 the Rotary

4 Miss Blackstock married Henry John Cody in 1933 and was subsequently referred to in the press and other sources as Mrs. H. J. Cody.

5 Toronto Daily Star, 27 April, 1939, p.4.

6 <http://www.vha.ca/about-us>

Club also provided a grant. Funds from the Atkinson Foundation and several estates were made for the purpose of special studies.⁷ However the organization struggled to meet the urgent need for their services and lacked proper space for training and administration.

A member of the VHA Board, Ruth Dean met W. Garfield Weston and then wrote to him independently and without the knowledge of the association in November 1964 outlining the needs of the VHA and appealing for financial support.⁸ Ms. Dean indicated that "growth had not been proportionate to the need because of budget restrictions." In September of that year, of 500 applications for assistance only the most urgent 100 could be accepted. "Here I might say that most families are not relief recipients but are at such a low subsistence level that any emergency shatters them morally and economically....More homemakers can be attracted only when wages are comparable with those in the industry. Enlarged space is required for training programmes and administration. It is in the latter respect that your help could be most significant."⁹

In February 1967, the W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation confirmed that they would provide a gift of \$250,000 for the building and a further \$100,000 for the purchase of land. In May 1968, the property at 170 Merton Street was purchased by the VHA. Leslie Rebanks, the architect, submitted drawings for a building permit in December 1968.¹⁰

The VHA moved into the premises in November 1969. In a letter written to the Foundation in December 1969, the VHA wrote expressing their delight: "Our Board of Directors and our staff, including 180 Homemakers, are very proud of our new premises and most appreciative of your generous Foundation grant... The atmosphere of the building is pleasant, quiet and has considerably boosted staff morale."¹¹

The building was dedicated to the memory of Mrs. W. Garfield (Reta) Weston (1897-1967) in a formal opening ceremony in February 1970.¹² Reta Lila Howard Weston was born on a farm near Powassan, Ontario. Following the death of her father, her mother moved to Toronto and opened a boarding house so that her son and daughter could attend Jarvis Collegiate. Reta attended the University of Toronto where she was a student at Victoria College. In 1920, she met Willard Garfield Weston (1898-1878). They married and together raised six daughters and three sons "in whom she inculcated her love of learning and strong personal commitment to children and the community."¹³ In 1958, W. Garfield and Reta Weston established the W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation which is based in both Canada and the United Kingdom.

The VHA occupied the building at 170 Merton Street until 2010 when they sold the property to Cresford Developments and relocated to 30 Soudan Avenue.

7 Ruth Dean, Letter to W. Garfield Weston, November 6, 1964.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 City of Toronto Building Records, File 3333, Permit A413, Records from the VHA

11 Mrs. G. K. Masters, President, VHA, December 8, 1969.

12 Toronto Daily Star, 26 February 1970, p 69.

13 VHA, September 2017.

Architect: Leslie Rebanks

Leslie Rebanks (b. 1927) was born in Cockerham, Lancashire, England. After enlisting with the Grenadier Guards in 1945 and serving as a commissioned officer with the Northern Regiment, he studied architecture at the Oxford School of Architecture. A fascination with the work of American architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, led to his immigration to Canada in 1957, where he joined the Ottawa firm of Balharrie and Helmer, then Fabbro and Towend in Sudbury. On joining the Montreal firm of Greenspoon, Friedlander and Dunne he was sent on a tour of U.S. shopping centres "which proved to be a pivotal influence on my subsequent career."¹⁴ In 1958, Rebanks submitted an entry for the Toronto City Hall competition with the architect, J. Fielding. Rebanks toured the United States visiting the offices of the leading architects including Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki and Frank Lloyd Wright's studio etc. as well as innovative works such as the Farnsworth House.¹⁵

Rebanks returned to England in the early 1960s and set up a practice in London where he met W. Garfield Weston and with his son, Galen Weston, embarked on a series of commercial centres combining shopping strip malls with office towers in Ireland. In 1965 he returned to live in Canada and established Leslie Rebanks Architects.¹⁶

The VHA headquarters building was one of his earliest Toronto commissions and one that would have a formative influence on his later works including the 1970s Bauta House, in Newton, Connecticut that was featured in the February 1979 issue of the globally influential A+U journal and the Wittington Tower at 22 St. Clair Avenue East, 1975, which in 1976 won the Grand Prize for the George Weston Ltd. interiors and honourable mention for the lobby from the American Institute of Business Designers.

During his career, Rebanks has had commissions as far away as New Zealand, where he designed the Auckland Regional Authority Building, the United States, where he designed a series of police headquarters in Iowa, Massachusetts, and California as well as in Toronto, Peel Region, Oshawa and Sarnia. Other projects included laboratories in Sarnia, the Marina Lodge Cardiac Centre, and the Ganaraska Regional Conservation Authority building as well as Toronto Loblaws stores which were part of the company's revitalization including those at 650 Dupont Street, 1996, 10 Lower Jarvis Street, 1998 and St. Clair Ave. E, 1999. A 2001 article in *Canadian Architect* praised the new Loblaws stores for their high degree of amenity, positive urbanistic relationship with the surrounding neighbourhoods and the skylit, double-height spaces which were believed to "contribute to customer satisfaction and sales."¹⁷ It also noted that the London-based, *wallpaper** magazine declared the Lower Jarvis Street Loblaws one of the five best stores in the world.¹⁸ Following the success of the Toronto stores, Loblaws asked Rebanks Architects to design stores for northern Ontario and Eastern Canada.

Leslie Rebanks is a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Ontario Association of Architects and he is a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of

¹⁴ Rebanks, email, 18 September 2017.

¹⁵ Rebanks, conversation 12 September 2017.

¹⁶ The firm became Rebanks Architects in 1986 and is now known as Rebanks, Pepper, Littlewood, Boyd Architects.

¹⁷ Polo, pp. 22-25.

¹⁸ Op cit., p. 25

Canada. In 1984 he was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts. Rebanks' design talents range from architecture, to industrial and furniture design as well as sculpture and were informed by a fusion of aesthetic, practical, environmental and technological interests. The projects include microwave towers, door handles, tensile park structures, laboratories and the Centreton Passive Energy house, Cobourg, 1979 and the 1980 Marina Lodge, North York home and workshop for the disabled both of which received Italy's Global Housing Silver Medals. His work has been recognized nationally and internationally receiving urban design, energy efficiency and industrial and interior design awards. He was featured with other leading Canadian architects in the 1985 CBC films series "A Modern Country." The kernel of this fusion of interests and commitment is evident in the VHA headquarters building at 170 Merton Street.

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Visiting Homemakers Association, 170 Merton Street

The former Visiting Homemakers Association building, designed in 1968 by the architect Leslie Rebanks, is a fine example of the Late Modern style which emerged following World War II. The building includes a rectangular box-form with four octagonal towers. (*Images 8-10*) The box, was supported with a steel structure creating a large, column-free, flexible interior space which could be subdivided according to need and contained the primary functions of the organization, office space at the upper levels and a basement with facilities for training staff including a kitchen. Its roof was a thick white slab, overhanging the windows for shade on the south elevation, a contrasting white horizontal to the vertical lines of dark grey towers. The four towers housed the more particular functions including staircases and washrooms, a basement board room with a specially-designed meeting table, a ground floor waiting room and at the second floor level, a terrace adjacent to the executive director's office which Rebanks described as "an executive pacing balcony."¹⁹ (*Images 11-13*) While the rectangular box had bands of horizontal "ribbon windows" which the executive director, Kathryn Taggart said provided "the feeling of having so much light," and the architect said were to illustrate that "life is worth living,"²⁰ were typical of the technological expression of the early twentieth-century Modernism, the octagonal forms of the towers, with their solid walls of tinted concrete brick cladding, evoked "castle-like" associations and a sense of craftsmanship that was part of a humanistic sensibility that emerged in architecture following the war.

Rather than being entirely progressive and forward looking, eschewing the past and tradition, Late Modern architecture evoked traditional and familiar forms with associated meaning. *The Globe and Mail* commented that the building had a "solidly built look about it" and Rebanks replied that that was "exactly as he intended because the (then) 45-year old organization was regarded as a 'pillar in the community.'"²¹ The *Toronto Daily Star* called it a "twentieth-century castle"²² and indeed Rebanks has discussed his appreciation of the castles in England where he was born. The octagonal forms are also

¹⁹ The *Globe and Mail*, February 26, 1970, p. W4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Toronto Daily Star*,

a functional improvement on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright which frequently featured hexagons and which Rebanks greatly admired but believed octagons were more useful for planning purposes, especially for offices. Octagons as opposed to squares had less surface area and were therefore also more economical to clad.²³

A tight budget resulted in the choice of concrete brick instead of face brick for the building's cladding. Rebanks tinted the brick a charcoal grey and then tinted the mortar to match to create a unified surface area which emphasized the geometry of the forms as well as the interlocking brick details at the corners which added texture and interest and evoked Norman masonry from an earlier millennium further which further extended the castle metaphor, but was also a cost-saving detail.²⁴

The other element, which is typical of the Late Modern style, is the integration of the landscape into the building, as seen with the first floor terrace, and the extension of the building into the landscape which was achieved with the paving of the forecourt in the same brick as the walls. The terrace included planting, a picnic table for staff and a tree was planted to provide shade.²⁵

In a letter to the W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation dated December 8, 1969, the VHA commended the design stating, "we feel that Mr. Rebanks has designed a building which is both imaginative and functional and presents to the community a strong enduring image for our Agency with obvious advantages over the less costly and more common "box type" of building."²⁶

iv. CONTEXT

The VHA is situated on the north side of Merton Street, east of Yonge Street within walking distance of the Davisville Subway Station. Between Yonge and Mount Pleasant Road, the street context is characterized by a mix of building types, heights and periods representing its evolution and history. (*Images 14-15*) Elements of the Victorian and industrial past survive in the early 20th century house at 267 Merton Street with its rear light industrial use on the south side of the street in proximity to the 19th century railway. (*Image 16*) The railway's conversion to the recreational Kaye Gardner Beltline Trail parallels the redevelopment of properties occupied by industrial buildings on Merton Street with low and mid-rise multiple housing complexes on the south side of the street. The west end of Merton Street, towards Yonge Street, is characterized by mid-rise residential and commercial buildings and a recent high-rise tower at 1815 Yonge Street at the south-west corner of Yonge and Merton Streets. (*Images 17-21*)

Amidst the century-old mix is a collection of distinctively-designed mid-century buildings constructed after the completion of the Yonge subway line which reflects a surge of

23 These principals were demonstrated at the award winning Wittington Building at 22 St. Clair Avenue East where less external skin resulted in a higher quality glazing with greater thermal efficiency and interiors where the angles of the octagon provided more interesting and special "corner offices" for executives.

24 Rebanks spoke of the Norman association and the cost saving in conversation, 12 September, 2017.

25 Patricia Triantafilou, VHA, conversation 14 September 2017.

26 Mrs. G. K. Masters, President, VHA, December 8, 1969.

development following the area's new accessibility. This resulted in the north side of the street being characterized by a mix of primarily low-rise commercial buildings which provide a strong architectural character typical of the third quarter of the twentieth century. *(Images 22-24)* Along with the low-rise commercial buildings were those constructed as purpose-built headquarters for social agencies including the Girl Guides, the War Amps and the VHA (50, 140 and 170 Merton Street, respectively). *(Images 25-26)* Later, agencies such as the Geneva Centre for Autism (112, 164 and 224 Merton Street), purchased already existing properties. *(Image 27)* Low-rise residential condominiums and town-house complexes maintain the low-rise character. *(Image 15 above)*

While Merton Street presents an architectural and typological mix representing its history, the post-war development following the advent of the subway and the increased presence of social agencies is one of its strongest defining features. The VHA building at 170 Merton Street is an important contributor to that particular neighbourhood character.

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

The former Visiting Homemakers Association headquarters building has design value as a distinctive representative of the post-war style known as Late Modernism. A high degree of artistic merit and craftsmanship is evident in the castle-like massing of the building including the octagonal towers and bays, the integration of a terrace space within the complex and the use of concrete brick and mortar (originally pigmented a dark grey) with expressed corner joints combined with 'ribbon windows.'

Historical or Associative Value	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	X
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	X

The building has associative value as the first purpose-built headquarters for the Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA), a Toronto-based social welfare agency which was founded in 1925 by Barbara Blackstock providing care to disadvantaged families, the sick, the elderly and people living with intellectual disability and homelessness while also undertaking research and reporting on the co-relation between low wages, poverty and health. The VHA occupied the building for 40 years until 2010. The building also has value for its association with the W. Garfield Weston Foundation who donated the building and the property to the VHA dedicating it to the memory of Mrs. W. Garfield (Reta) Weston in 1970. The building has associative value as a formative work in the career of the Toronto-based architect Leslie Rebanks, a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and an elected member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, known for his award winning and critically-acclaimed projects for Wittington Properties Ltd. and Loblaws.

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

Contextually, the VHA headquarters building is important in defining and maintaining the mid-twentieth century character of Merton Street which, following the completion of the Yonge Subway line in 1954 and the local Davisville station, saw the transformation of the street from a late 19th-century road characterized by industrial buildings and Victorian semi-detached dwellings and row houses to a dense urban street of low-rise residential and commercial buildings with a variety of distinctive designs. The introduction of health and social welfare agencies, including the Girl Guides and War Amps as well as the VHA which had specially-designed headquarters, contributes to the distinctive post-war, architectural character of the street.

4. SUMMARY

Following research and evaluation according to Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 170 Merton Street, containing the former Visiting Homemakers Association building has design, associative and contextual values.

Constructed in 1969, the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building has design value as a representative example of a distinctive Late Modern style building designed as the headquarters for the VHA featuring octagonal towers and bays, ribbon windows, concrete brick with distinctive interlocking corners and an integrated exterior space with landscaping. The property has value as it is the first purpose-built headquarters for the VHA, an important social-welfare agency founded in Toronto in 1925. Designed by the Toronto-based architect Leslie Rebanks, the building is also valued for its association with the W. Garfield Weston Foundation which donated the funds for the property and the building dedicating it to the memory of Mrs. Reta Weston. The property has contextual value as it contributes to the post-war character of distinctively-designed, low-rise residential, commercial and social agency buildings which transformed Merton Street from its Victorian industrial beginnings following the completion of the Yonge Street subway line in 1954.

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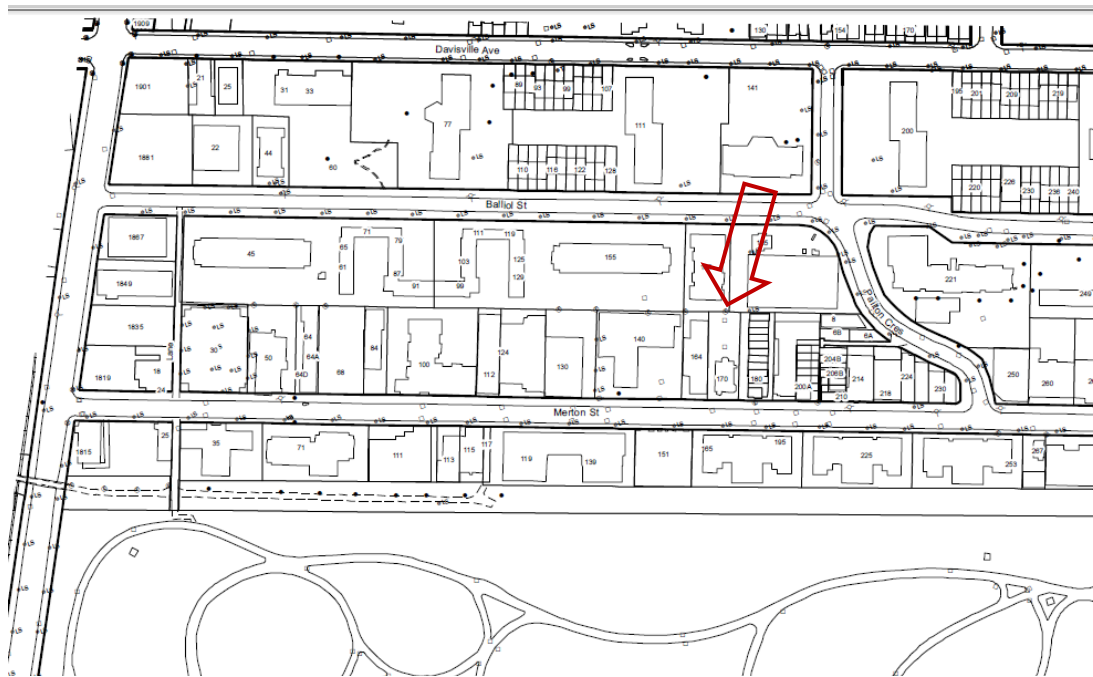
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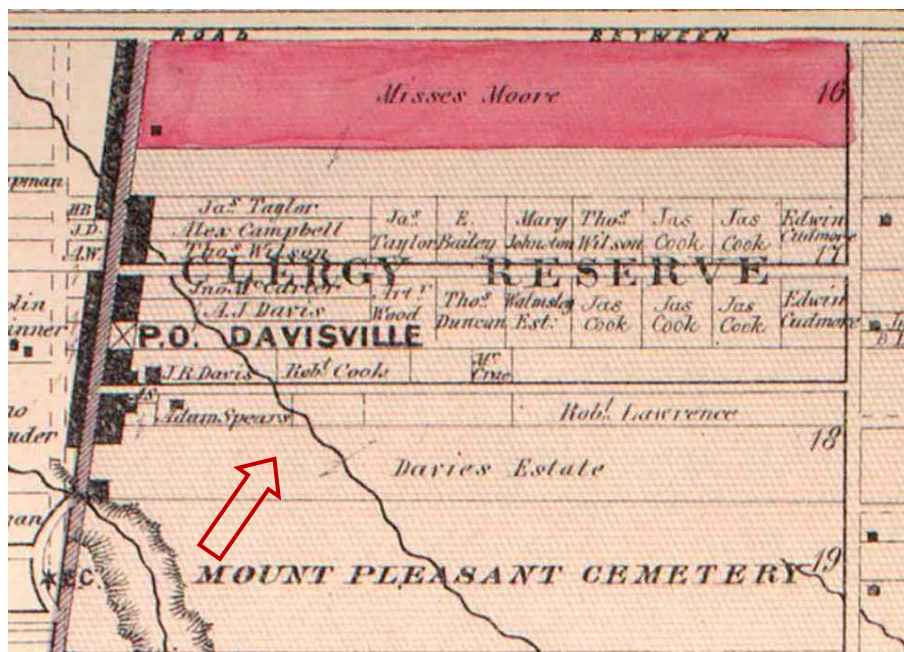
6. IMAGES:

The arrows mark the location of the property at 33 Murray Avenue.

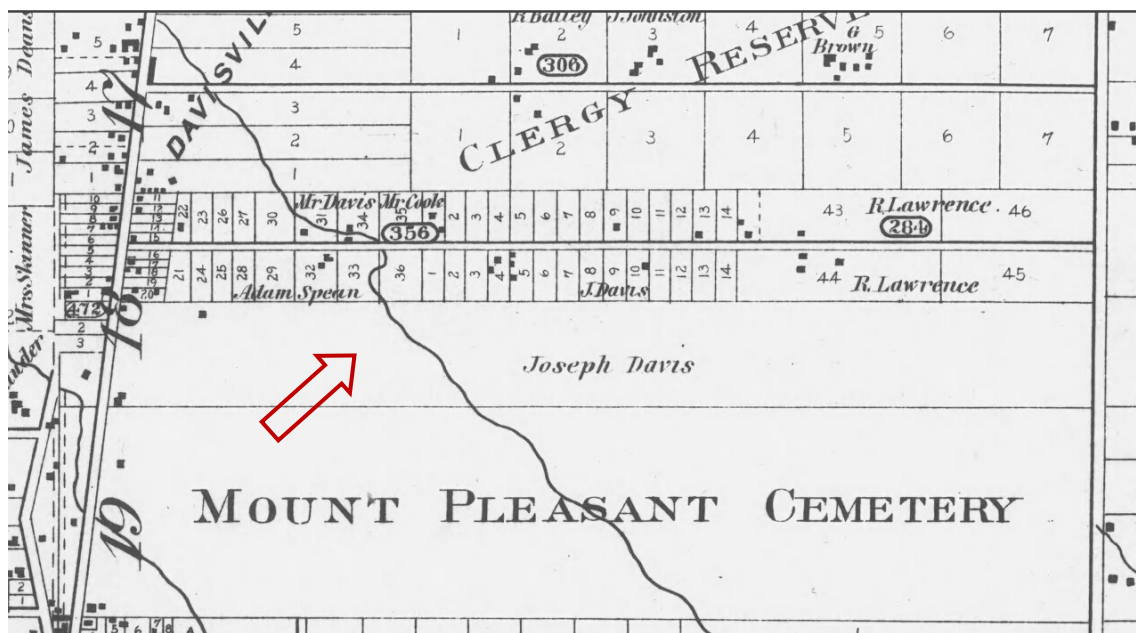
Please note: all maps are oriented with north at the top, unless otherwise indicated.



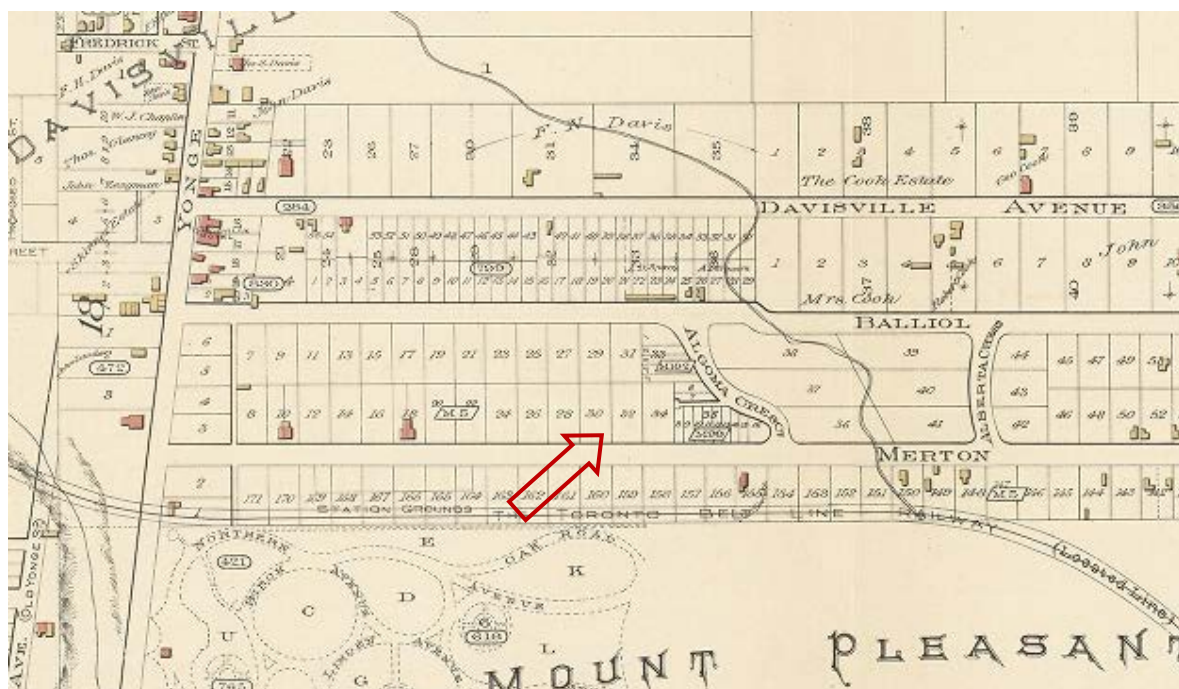
1. City of Toronto Property Data Map: the subject property at 170 Merton Street is marked on the north side of Merton Street, between Yonge Street and Pailton Crescent.



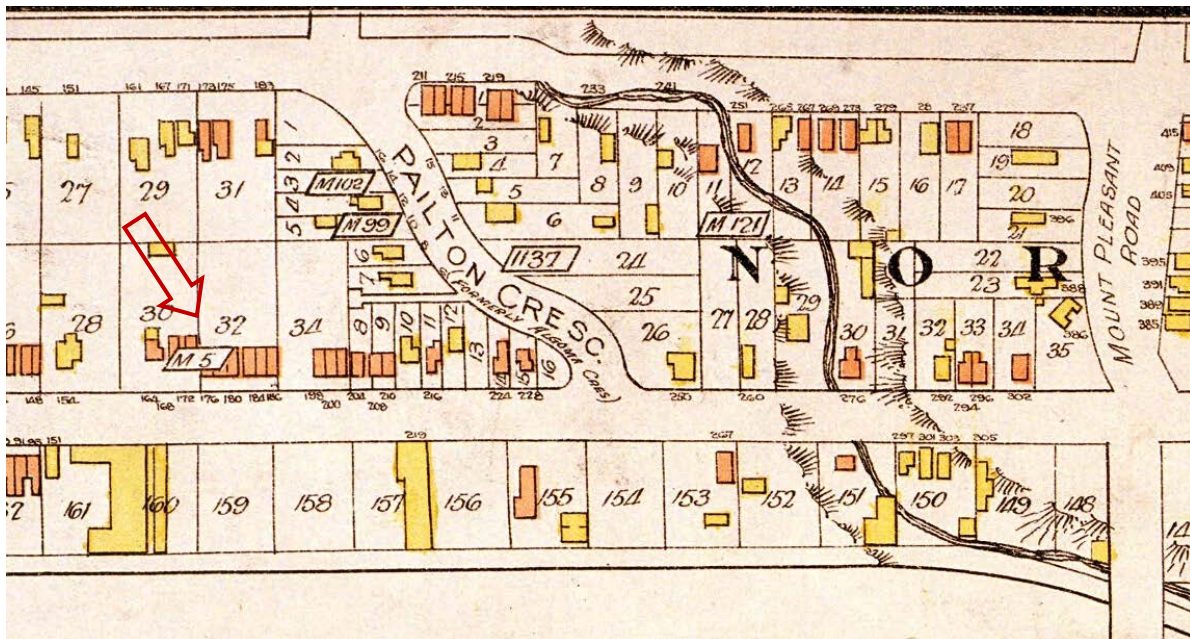
2. Miles & Co., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York*, (detail), 1878: showing Davisville, to the east of Yonge Street, with its post office, the school (next to 'J.R. Davis'), and the property marked A. J. Davis where the pottery was located. Nb: the school fronts onto the street now known as Davisville Avenue. (Ng)



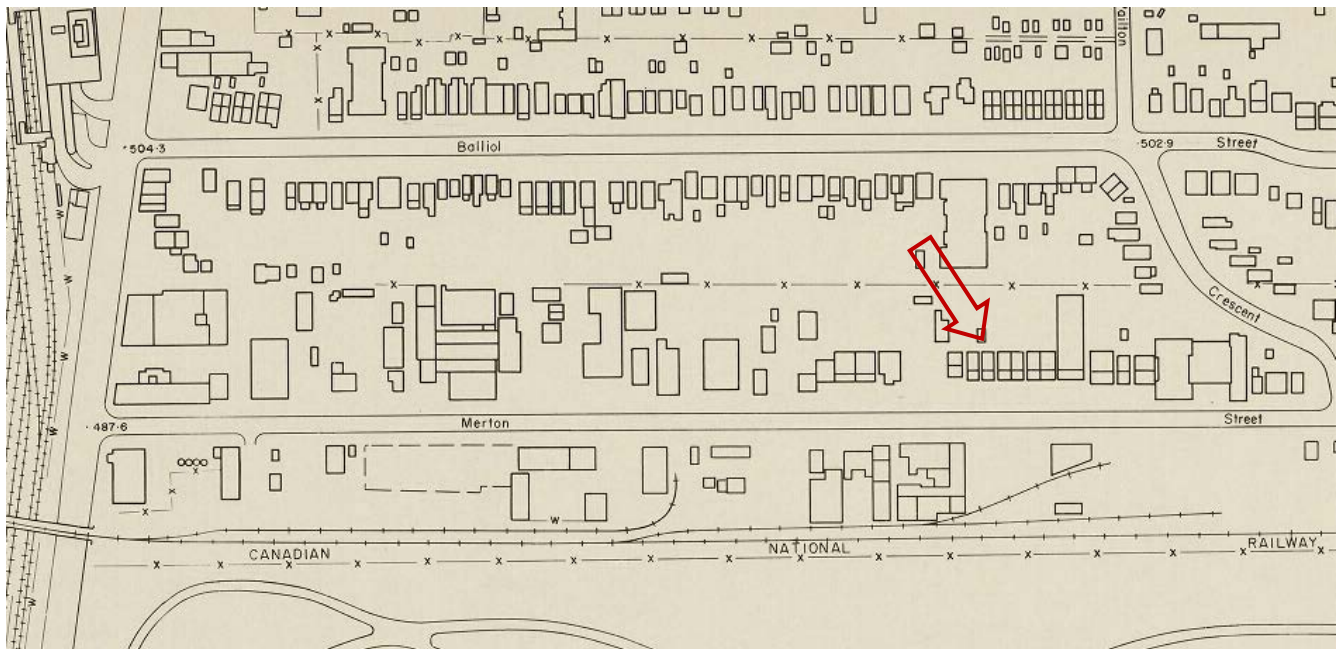
3. Goad's Atlas, 1884 (detail): showing the southern half of Lot 18 owned by Joseph (Stanley) Davis. (City of Toronto Archives, CTA)



4. Goad's Atlas, 1890 (detail): showing the M5 subdivision of the Joseph Stanley property and the creation of Balliol and Merton Streets, the layout of Algoma Crescent (now known as Pailton Crescent) parallel to the course of Mud Creek to the east and the Toronto Beltline running along the edge of the properties on the south side of Merton Street north of Mount Pleasant Cemetery (CTA)



5. Goad's Atlas 1924 showing the development on the north side of Merton Street which is primarily houses of mixed types and on the south side primarily industrial properties adjacent to the railway line. (CTA)



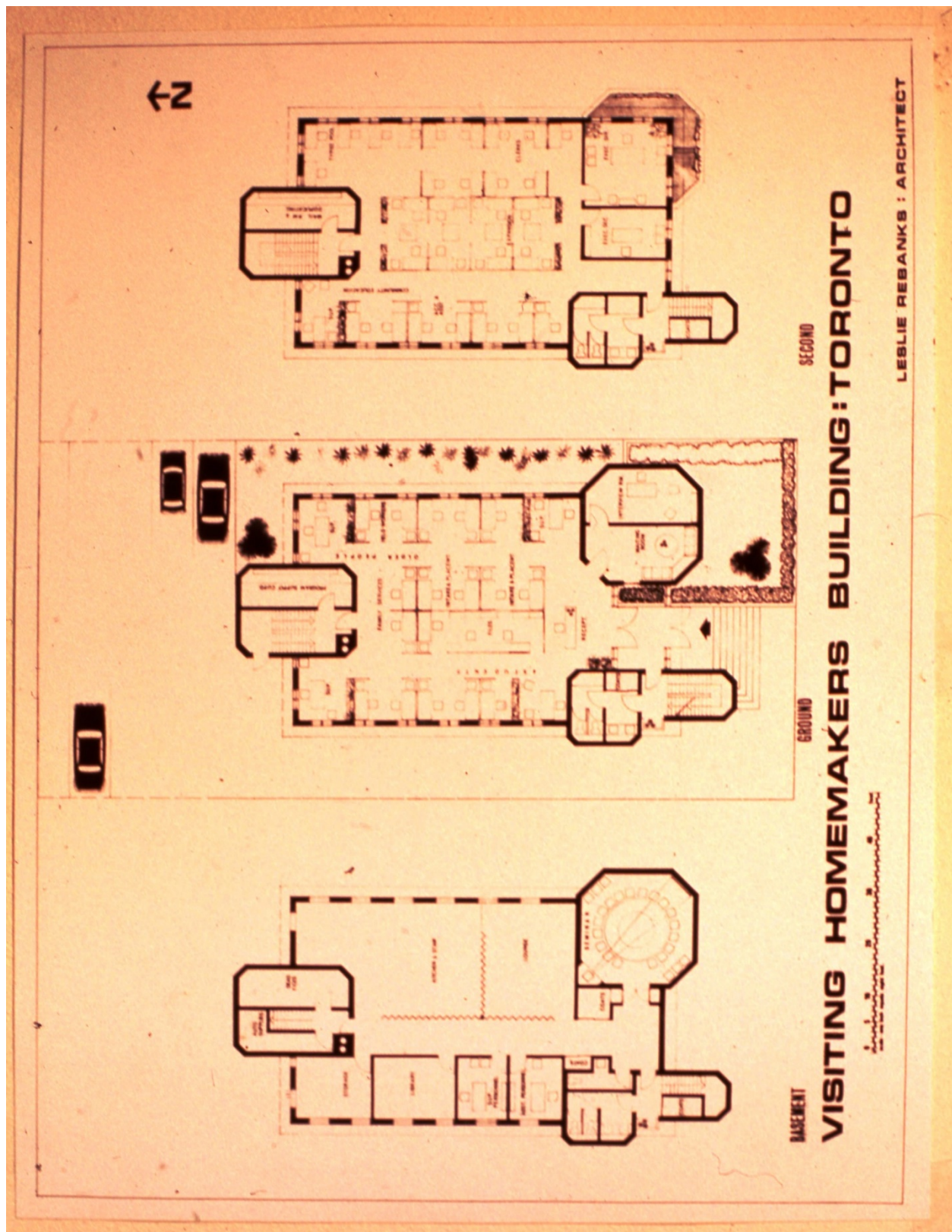
6. City of Toronto Planning Board Atlas, Sheet 29, Part D, based on aerial photography from April 1959 Drawing 1960, (detail): showing the primarily industrial and commercial development of Merton Street with remnants of residential properties and the CNR railway line with its sidings providing access to various properties. Note also the completed Yonge subway line at the west end of Merton Street and a portion of the Davisville subway station. The arrow indicates the approximate location of 170 Merton Street which until 1968 was occupied by semi-detached houses and two sets of three row houses. (CTA)



8. VHA, South Elevation showing an early photograph of the building with the original pigmented concrete brick and three of the towers with the entrance stairs and the planted terrace (Leslie Rebanks)

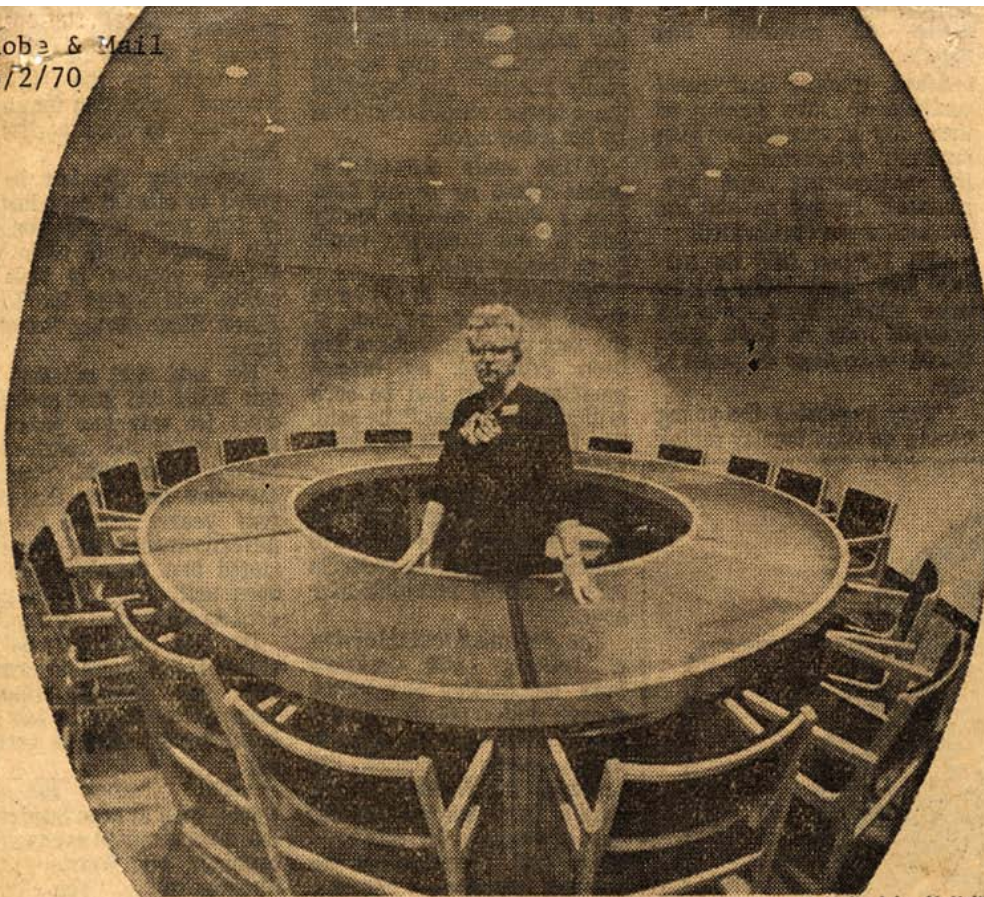


9. VHA, South and East elevations showing an early photograph of the building with the planted terrace and the ribbon windows (Leslie Rebanks)



10. Leslie Rebanks Architects, Plans for the Visiting Homemakers Building, 1968, showing the rectangular volume with the four octagonal towers containing the stairs, washrooms, board room (basement), interview room (first floor) and terrace for the executive director (second floor). (Leslie Rebanks)

Globe & Mail
26/2/70



—Globe and Mail, John McNeill

Kathryn Taggart, executive director of the Visiting Homemakers Association, poses in the seminar room of the new headquarters where open house was held yesterday.

Building projects group's image

The Visiting Homemakers Association's new headquarters has a solidly built look about it.

Its architect, Leslie Rebanks, said this is exactly as he intended because the 45-year-old organization is regarded as a "pillar in the community."

Mr. Rebanks was on hand for the official opening yesterday of the Merton Street building and the unveiling of the plaque which says the \$250,000 building was given by the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Last November the staff moved into the new quarters, the first in their history built just for them. Until then this organization that offers home care to the elderly and the ill has operated from a succession of old houses.

Kathryn Taggart, the Homemakers' executive director since 1961, chose burnt orange for the carpet in her office. Outside her office is the building's one balcony, described by Mr. Rebanks as an executive pacing balcony.

The structure is built for expansion, Miss Taggart said.

There is enough space to accommodate a headquarters staff of 43. However, the association has only 27 on its staff.

The lower level is equipped with a service demonstration kitchen, where homemakers are trained.

Light is one great feature because Mr. Rebanks intended the building to illustrate that "life is worth living."

"I think it's amazing," Miss Taggart said. "We only have 25 to 30 per cent window space, but we get the feeling of having so much light."

11. Article in *The Globe and Mail* on the design of the VHA new headquarters, 26 February, 1970, p. W4. The photograph features Kathryn Taggart, executive director of the VHA posing inside the boardroom table designed by Rebanks (VHA)

Visiting homemakers get new headquarters



VISITING HOMEMAKERS have a home of their own after 45 years of social work in Toronto. Guests enjoy refreshments at the presentation of Merton St. headquarters to the association by the Garfield Weston Foundation yesterday.

By BETTY STAPLETON
Star Staff Writer

The Visiting Homemakers Association came into formal ownership of its new building yesterday when a representative of the W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation made the presentation and Mrs. G. Masters, president of the board, accepted it.

The three-storey building at 170 Merton St., was designed by architect Leslie Rebanks. The Weston Foundation donated \$100,000 to purchase the land and another \$250,000 to pay for the building. A plaque dedicates the building to the memory of Mrs. Weston.

The Visiting Homemakers has been serving "families in distress" in Toronto for nearly 45 years, but this is the first time it has had a home of its own.

The new building not only has ample room for the present staff of 178 homemakers and 27 headquarters personnel, it also provides space for the eventual expansion of the agency to 300 homemakers and office staff of 43.

The Visiting Home Services are now provided to three areas of the community.

It's oldest service is that to "families in distress" It provides a homemaker to the family with young children

which is bereft of the mother because of illness, death, or desertion. The homemaker goes into the home for nine and a half hours in such cases but the agency cannot provide such service on a long term basis.

The service is provided to those families who cannot afford to buy the service it needs and this confines it mainly to low income families. At the present time it cannot help the middle income family although it is felt a need for service exists in that area too.

The Homemakers now give service to older people on a part time basis to make it possible for the elderly to stay in their own homes as long as possible.

The third area of service is sharing in the Home Care program designed to provide care at home to the ill either before or after hospitalization.

The Visiting Homemakers is a participating agency in the United Community Fund and receives about 50 per cent of its funds from that source.

The Association is anxious to extend its service to families, particularly to those in the suburbs but it feels restricted because of lack of funds, inadequate training facilities and the difficulty of recruiting suitable homemakers.

TORONTO DAILY STAR
Thurs., Feb. 26, 1970 *66



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12. Article in the Toronto Daily Star, 26 February 1970, p. 69 on the presentation of the new VHA headquarters by the W. Garfield Weston Charitable Foundation. (TPL)

MONEY



—Star photos by Dagh Jurell

ROUNDED TOWERS give the air of a 20th century minicastle to the new headquarters of the Visiting Homemakers Association, on Merton St. The towers are not just ornaments. They are used for washrooms, dead files and a round board room with a board table. Building combines economy and beauty.

Here's an architect who believes in combining beauty and economy

By MACK PARLIAMENT
Star staff writer

Architects and the public want buildings that are beautiful. Businessmen want buildings that are functional and cheap.

The common assumption is that the two objectives are incompatible. Beautiful buildings are expensive; economical buildings are ugly and shoddy.

But architect Leslie Rebanks doesn't agree. He thinks he has proved that beauty and economy can be combined. His argument is his design of the Visiting Homemakers Association building on Merton St.

Not unlike a 20th century castle, the modern structure opened recently is attractive and doesn't disturb the character of the neighborhood.

English-born Rebanks estimates he saved \$30,000 or more on the \$221,000 building. Yet he produced 20,000 square feet of column-free space.

Four many-sided towers screen the functional box comprising the main working area in two storeys and a basement. The towers are not merely ornamental; they are used for staircases, washrooms, dead files and even a circular board room.

Rebanks designed the circular board-room table himself: like a giant doughnut mirroring the shape of the tower. Discussion participants can sit around the outside, or, if few in numbers, they can sit on the inside for greater intimacy.

Even the lowly garbage cans were not overlooked.

Space was made for them in a plaster. While waiting to be emptied they remain inoffensively out of sight and don't detract from the building.

The architect obtained the cheapest brick available and had the bricks dyed a charcoal gray. The mortar was also dyed to keep the color effect as 20 to 25 per cent of an exterior wall is mortar.

Even on the tower corners each brick tier moves in a straight line with no corner bricks. This was not only cheaper but gives the corners a unique appearance as though they had been sewn together in a saddle's stiff cemented by leather thongs.

Rebanks' work reflects not only concern with construction but with facilities for living and quality of life for those using a building, seeing it and living near it.

Although the cheapest form of a building is a box Rebanks took many of the functions out of the box and placed them in the towers—a centuries old planning principal used in medieval castles.

Rebanks designs cover a wide range of structures: Banks in London, shopping centres in Dublin and other architectural compositions in Switzerland and West Africa. All bear the stamp of Rebanks' imagination but are competitive in price to their box-line counterparts.

The Merton St. building is set back 12 feet from the street line forming a small plaza of the same brick as the building itself, blending with the building and giving the impression of it being set back further from the street line than it actually is.



BRITISH-BORN architect Leslie Rebanks perches on round-table in the board room of the building in Toronto. He designed the building to fit into the neighborhood yet evoke the theme of home protection. Four towers screen the functional box which comprises the main, working area of two storeys and semi-basement.

13. Article in the Toronto Daily Star, 10 March, 1970, p. 12, by Mark Parliament on the design of the building and the boardroom table featuring the architect, Leslie Rebanks. (VHA)



14. VHA, 170 Merton Street, showing the context of the north side of Merton Street with townhouses and condominiums maintaining the low-rise scale of the street (HPS, 2016)



15. North side of Merton Street showing the context with recent low-rise townhouses and condominiums at 180, 194 and 200 Merton Street and beyond the tree which marks 170 Merton, the low-rise office building occupied by the Geneva Centre for Autism at 164 Merton Street (HPS, 2017)



16. 267 Merton Street, south side of Merton Street, showing one of the remaining houses from the late 19th-early 20th century period with a later industrial use introduced behind the house. (HPS, 2017)



17. Merton Street, looking east from 50 Merton Street (ramp at left) showing the mid-rise housing of the last quarter of the twentieth century (HPS 2017)



18. Merton Street looking east with the Hospital Workers Housing Co-Op, 100 Merton Street, on the left, and low-rise housing on the right, south side. (HPS 2017)



19. 119-139 Merton Street, mix of low-mid-rise housing at 119-139 Merton Street completed in 2001. (HPS, 2016)



20. 151-253 Merton Street, south side looking east, showing the mix of low-mid-rise housing on the south side of the street. (HPS, 2017)



21. West end of Merton Street, high rise tower at 1815 Yonge Street (HPS, 2017)



22. East end of Merton Street towards Pailton Crescent showing the examples of low-rise commercial buildings. (HPS, 2017)



23. 214-218 Merton Street, north side, east of 170 Merton Street: showing the 1950s-1960s low-rise commercial buildings on the north side of Merton Street, west of Pailton Crescent whose design contributes to the distinctive mid-century character of the street (HPS, 2016)



24. 290 Merton Street, north side of Merton Street, another example of 1950s-1960s low-rise development with distinctive architectural design and character. (HPS, 2017)



25. Girl Guides of Canada, 50 Merton Street, showing the purpose-built headquarters which contributes to the low-rise, post-war architectural character of the street (HPS, 2017)



26. War Amps Headquarters, 1959, 140 Merton Street showing another example of a purpose-built social agency headquarters with distinctive mid-century modern design. (HPS, 2016)



27. 164 Merton Street, owned by the Geneva Centre for Autism, and showing another example of unique post-war architectural design on Merton Street with the VHA at 170 Merton to the right (HPS, 2017)