

**320 Maple Avenue, Oakville**

**BUILDING ASSESSMENT REPORT:**

**February 7, 2018**

**Prepared by: T. Murison**

**1.01** The purpose of this Building Assessment Report is to examine and identify the characteristics and age of this house, currently included in the list of Oakville Heritage buildings. The building can barely be seen from the street because of overgrown foliage. This is the first time it has been studied thoroughly to determine whether it has any heritage attributes. The house is approximately 90 years old and is one of several dozen structures of a similar age in the neighborhood. Some of these buildings are good examples of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Does this house conform with other good local examples of Arts and Crafts types and design philosophy? Arts and Crafts design was a rather nebulous international movement from 1880 to 1925. It is summarized well by Monica Obniski and Independent Scholar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York:

**1.02** “ “ The Arts and Crafts movement emerged during the late Victorian period in England, the most industrialized country in the world at that time. Anxieties about industrial life fueled a positive revaluation of handcraftsmanship and precapitalist forms of culture and society. Arts and Crafts designers sought to improve standards of decorative design, believed to have been debased by mechanization, and to create environments in which beautiful and fine workmanship governed. The Arts and Crafts movement did not promote a particular style, but it did advocate reform as part of its philosophy and instigated a critique of industrial labor; as modern machines replaced workers, Arts and Crafts proponents called for an end to the division of labor and advanced the designer as craftsman. “ “ Monica Obniski/MOMA

**1.03** While the conditions of industrializing England had a far more severe and socially disruptive impact on the population, the conditions of industrializing Canada spawned burgeoning cities with populations beginning to live cheek by jowl in over-crowded tenements and cold water flats in The Junction, and St. Johns Ward in Toronto. It is ironic that this house is located in the hyperbolically named Tuxedo Park, close to the busy railway station that transported commuters to work in the City each day. Oakville was considered as an ideal suburb, surrounded by pastoral landscapes and long beaches on the Lake, but was supplying the labour needed to run the rapidly industrializing heart of the country. Houses close to the lake had been built gradually and with modest but skillful details typical of most agriculture-based small towns. Tuxedo Park developed as a tract of new lots open to commercial builders whose integrity and education were reflected in their design decisions. (The name Tuxedo Park was derived copied from previous developments in Chicago and Toronto as a way to advertise this as a “classy” new neighbourhood).

**1.04** Some builders sought to create beautiful and harmonious houses either for themselves or their clients. They had seen and appreciated a wide variety of building types and used architects to prepare the designs. Their designs reflected a wider commitment to society and community. At the other end of the scale, some sought profit and knew very little about design. Some of these itinerant builders had little more than a box of tools, a team and wagon. They did not use an architect and made decisions that were based almost entirely on minimizing their costs of construction. This Report will compare a variety of similar structures to see how this house fits the spectrum of houses so see if it should be included in the stock of significant structures.

**1.05** The railway line is only 300 meters from Maple Avenue. The only street closer to the railway is Pine Street. Houses further from the railway station and yard, were obviously built to a higher standard of construction and use better details. Lots that were further from the “tracks” were removed from the noise of trains and shunting at night. These lots commanded better prices. Itinerant builders usually chose the cheapest lots and calculated their profits according to how little they would expend to construct a house. This reasoning is contrary to the idea of using superior quality details and materials.

**1.06** Many houses in Tuxedo Park which are below Spruce Street show evidence architectural design or the coherence of package plans that were commissioned from architects. The details and elevations of 320 Maple are described below, in considerable detail. The Analysis and Summary will show that none of the architectural features used on this building conform with good examples of contemporary Arts and Crafts houses. The house is at the lowest end of the design spectrum. The weight of evidence will be used to suggest that it should not be preserved as a significant historic building and that it should be removed from the List of Heritage Buildings. Like “Respect”, heritage must be earned not demanded or conferred without merit. The building makes a strong case for its own removal from the heritage list.

**1.07** The owners of the house have purchased it recently, after renting the house for seven years. This neighborhood is their home and is where their daughter attends school. They have long experience with the many physical failings of the house. They have estimated the work that would be required to repair it and bring it up to a modern standard is close to the replacement cost of the entire building. If the building were only repaired to address its many failings, functionality would not change. The appearance of the house cannot be substantially improved because of “institutionalized” failings, ie. substandard ceiling heights on each of the three floors. The building lot is lower than surrounding properties and floods regularly. A trench drain in the basement was added decades ago to collect this constant drainage. This might be improved by re-grading the lot but would also require excavation of the perimeter of the foundation to add waterproofing. The expense is not justified in a basement with 6’-3” headroom, because any effort to install finishes or a ceiling would reduce clearance further.

## 2.0 OBSERVATIONS:



**2.01** South Elevation of 320 Maple Avenue. Porch and deck have been added at various times to the original house. Arbitrary decisions have been made throughout the history of the building.. The brick chimney was added externally and off the centerline of the roof. A porch was added with mismatched salvaged windows and doors. An exterior deck was then added but not completed approximately 35 years ago. Narrow clapboard, which may be the original wall surface of the ground floor is visible to just below the second floor window, beside the porch. A sliding aluminum window which does not relate to any other opening in the house, was inserted in this wall approximately 40 years ago. The center bracket on gable was omitted at the ridge, perhaps because the chimney was so close by or because the builder wanted to save a few more dollars than on the opposite elevation. The original bedroom window on the second floor does not match the modern bathroom window which was added in the past twenty years. The synthetic stucco and highly arbitrary placement of the wood trim complete the chaotic collection of features which the neighboring houses view every day. This elevation is not an exemplary Arts and Crafts house by any measure. This side shows the poor quality of the house better than the north (street) elevation, which is hidden by trees and shrubs.

**2.02** The house is located on the south side of Maple street between Reynolds Street & Allan Street in what was called (derivatively), Tuxedo Park. Tuxedo Park had been used as a marketing strategy in both Chicago and Toronto, before it was applied to this part of Oakville in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. century. Oakville was growing at

that time, towards the commuter railway station which allowed people to commute for work each day. The noise of trains less than 300 meters away, has always been a factor affecting this street. There are many mature trees including a 5' diameter maple on the western property line that has grown southward at a dramatic angle. It is very large and will be a hazard should it fall towards the house. It should be felled.

**2.03** The frame house is less than two storeys with a front verandah facing the street, (north-west). See page 30 for drawing. The verandah has three columns spaced unevenly, with the middle column much closer to the western corner. The tall shrubs obscure this uneven layout. The verandah was built with traditional wood details, heavy boards framing lattice panels for ventilation below the deck, a flight of five wooden treads and projecting rough sawn rafters covered with a fascia board. The verandah has been painted many times, but this has not concealed the poor quality of the workmanship in its construction. Exposed roof sheathing in the soffit is rough sawn, with missing knots indicating that a low grade of pine sheathing (# 3 or #4" grade) was used. Nails have been driven down through the porch and roof sheathing and are exposed at the soffits. This gives a rough splintered appearance to the soffits. Many houses, this age, would have had a second layer of pine tongue and groove soffit installed under the projecting sheathing to create a finished surface, but this was omitted, probably to save money.

**2.04** The builder tried to embellish the soffits of the main roof with a pair of small projecting brackets, but did not use them in a way that would represent an Arts and Crafts house. Arts and Crafts houses had a minimum of five brackets with one at the ridge and two at the midpoints of the soffit as well as the two near the corners of the walls. This elevation has three brackets and the ridge board was left awkwardly exposed, to be seen from below as a nailer for the fascia boards. This is not the work of a skilled carpenter, but an itinerant house builder. The brackets were fabricated with a projecting 3" block made by laminating two 2" x 4" together, supported on a similar built-up brace. A cleat was presumably used to connect the "beam" to the "brace" but it is buried in the wall below the stucco, and cannot be seen. The end of the bracket was cut square, leaving the two pieces of common lumber visible. This crudeness cannot be called craftsmanship of the simplest sort. There are numerous garages or summer cottages of this era that have better details than these house brackets. Leaving rough sawn boards & sheathing exposed has another unforeseen effect; providing a great place for wasps and birds to use for their homes. A large wasp nest is nestled under the ridge near the chimney, suggesting that this has been a perennial home for wasps, bees and mud daubers who belong in trees.

**2.05** The "fascia board" at the front of the roof is actually another rough sawn rafter that was left exposed. A reputable carpenter would use a finished pine fascia board to cover the rafter, and a shingle mould to support the edge course of wood shingles. This builder nailed a rough 1" x 2" board just under the shingles to act as a piece of trim. In the early 1920's a shingle mould or a beveled piece of clear stock would be installed to carry the drip edge of the shingles 1-1/2" beyond the fascia board. This builder did not bother to set the nail heads exposed on the little cleat. At

the brackets he cut halfway through the rafter to provide a bearing seat. Even this sawn connection between bracket and rafter is done poorly. The sawcut was made at the wrong angle which leaves a gap between the bracket and the rafter. Paint cannot hide the error. Further up on the fascia the pattern of gaps between sheathing betray shrinkage in green lumber. Narrower boards were used to fill in a gap caused by mis-measurement near the ridge. He did so with little regard for the appearance, and it detracts noticeably from the appearance of the roof.

**2.06** The brick chimney was installed on the exterior of the house. This is another sign of cost cutting. The bricks have deteriorated and spalled above the roof leaving a short stub of chimney projecting less than a foot above the ridge. There is no chimney cap or coping other than a thin bed of mortar on the top course. The mason ended the chimney less than two feet above the roof. The flue that this created will not draw properly in certain winds, and will not meet the building code today, because it is so close to the roof. The chimney has been painted the same colour as the wall but has a staircase crack and gaps in several places. The chimney needs repointing or rebuilding if the top courses have delaminated. It is not known whether the stainless steel flue from the hot water appliance is connected to a new flue liner inside the brick chimney.

**2.07** The second floor walls have been repaired with modern synthetic stucco applied between plain-sawn boards, in a sort of “mock Tudor” design. This synthetic material is very uniform and featureless, giving little indication that it is actually stucco. It has been used around all four sides of the house. When compared to the heavy cementitious stucco at the porch wall, the modern finish is completely different and two dimensional.

**2.08** The sides and exposed back walls at the ground floor have been covered with cream coloured vinyl siding. The first impression from a distance is that a narrow clapboard was used to cover the walls. Closer inspection shows the loose joints or seams that are characteristic of stock lengths of synthetic siding on a longer wall.



**2.09** West wall with vinyl siding applied over old sheathing. Note the use of standard vinyl trim edge moulding to secure siding at corners and old window trim. This vinyl 'outline' or 'border' emphasizes the width and imperfections of the old material, degrading the appearance of the house. In this elevation the spalling cementitious parging also shows the blockwork foundation below. Various holes & service connections through the wall form a random pattern of aging structure along the wall. The original wood windows have been covered with plastic to try to protect them from further weathering and decay. While this is not unusual for a 90 year old house, it detracts from appearance and would require replacement for improvement. All four of the original basement windows appear to be the same condition.

**2.10** The back porch appears to have begun life as a covered deck with a railing. Over time various used windows were incorporated in the structure to close it in. Three of the tall sash may have been reclaimed from a house with unusually tall but narrow openings. The muntins or divisions in these three units are rectangular in section suggesting that they too were crudely made or 'home-built' in order to close in the porch. Each of these three units has been nailed in at a different height above the floor, with small pieces of plywood used to close the gap between the deck and the bottom of the window.



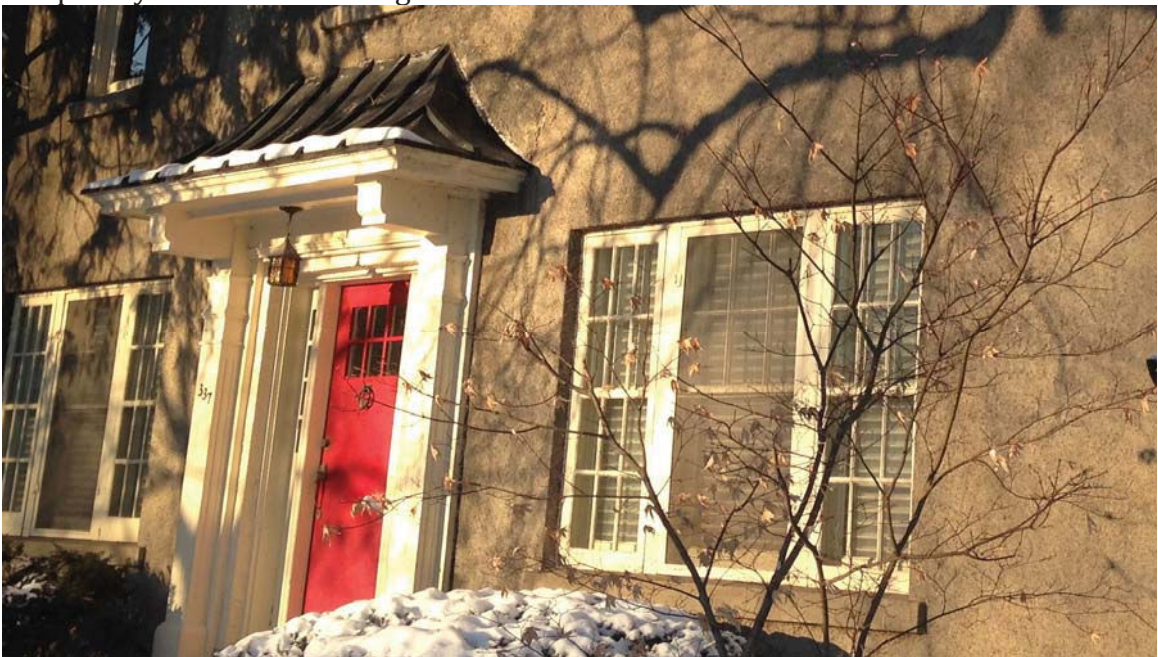
**2.11** Random collection of recycled windows used to close in porch. Railings and decks were added variously with low quality materials & workmanship.

**2.12** The porch rafters and beam are exposed above the porch windows. A reclaimed window has been cut down to fit the trapezoidal shape above the screen door. Misalignment is the order of the day. This random collection of parts does not represent an architectural plan or landmark. It is simply an *ad hoc* result of various people using hammers over the decades. A small fragment of cement stucco is visible at the corner of the door. This stucco is so different from the fragment on the verandah wall, as to suggest that it was done at a different time, or by a different hand. It was not possible to determine whether the stucco was original or a repair where wood siding had deteriorated and been replaced.

**2.13** The siding on the east and west walls suggest that clapboard may have been used originally on all four elevations, with repairs done in stucco on the north and corner of the south elevation, at a later date. The vinyl siding may also be a replacement/repair. If clapboard was used originally as the typical, and least expensive, siding material, the entire house has been covered with replacement material. The second floor walls were in poor condition a decade ago, so were repaired with new "faux" half timber and synthetic stucco. The only wall that may remain significant in terms of material is the north facing verandah wall, which will be discussed in the discussion section; Stucco.



**2.14** Arts & Crafts Cottage with stucco panels circa 1905. Texture of the stucco is pebbly with small stones brought to the surface. 383 Douglas Ave. The vertical “timbers” above are aligned with similar “timbers” below the windows. This is a feature of decorative half timbering which suggests that the trim is both real structure and load bearing, essential characteristics which provide the “honesty” of form espoused by Ruskin and others before the Arts & Crafts Movement. The narrow transom lights and bell-cast roof, wall proportions etc. are also reminiscent of Japanese influenced Arts & Crafts design that were the inspiration for a carefully planned façade. This house was likely designed by an architect with knowledge of contemporary Arts & Crafts design themes.



**2.15** #337 Douglas Ave., Oakville, a two storey house with fine aggregate stucco. This subdued and uniform texture is more typical of houses circa 1925. The natural grey stucco colour weathered gradually. The character of the stucco was appreciated as an “honest” material, another hallmark of Arts & Crafts.





**2.16** #359 Douglas Ave., Oakville. Another example of Tudor Revival with stucco in panels. In this beautiful example the “half timbers” are actually pegged in place with protruding oak trenails. The stucco has light texture with small triangular indentations made with the trowel, circa 1910. Stucco was not painted but left exposed to weather along with the stone lintels, sills & freize board painted a colour similar to that of the limestone lintels. The eavestroughs are modern and cover the rafters.



**2.17** # 379 Douglas . A timid sort of “half timber” with small boards at wide spacing. The panels are not stucco but painted cobble infill, convex in form. concave. The moderate (4”) size cobbles create the most dramatic texture found in similar age houses. The poor quality of the soffit is quite different from the previous example. This example of another ill conceived builder’s special, had brick walls and arches.



**2.18** # 38 Second Street. The heavy texture and downward stroke used by the plasterer is similar to that at 320 Maple, but this former barn was heavily modified in the 1970's or later. The stucco finish has been installed on top of the cedar shakes on the steep roof. They are not more than 40 years old. While dramatic, this is a good example of a modern style of stucco that was not used in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Oakville.



**2.19** Another example of smooth Arts & Crafts stucco circa 1910, 335 Watson Ave. The small brackets are integrated with fascias & mouldings projecting eaves with exposed rafter tails multiple "ganged" windows, and emphasized chimneys with ornamental caps & flues. The effect is subtle & carefully planned. No "half timbering" was used but brick details were added to punctuate the stucco at sills and corners. This sophisticated example with hipped gables is more German or Baltic than British though the window arrangements are similar to those of C.F.A. Voysey, an exemplary Arts and Crafts Architect.



**2.20** # 429 MacDonald Ave. This is another example of an early 20<sup>th</sup>. C. “Tudor Revival” house, with a subtle mix of brick textures at the ground floor and center gable, “half timber and stucco” at the second floor flanking the center gable, and a heavy timber portico at the entry. The timbers are raised away from the pebbly stucco and protect it from weather. The proportions of timber to stucco are similar to that of medieval wattle and daub infill. The absence of diagonal braces makes this design slightly monotonous and formulaic.



**2.21** #320 George Street. Much modified house circa 1859, with additions in early 20<sup>th</sup>. C. The stucco is slightly rough but without rusticated embellishment and sweeps. Many houses in the center of town have a consistent texture & workmanship, often painted as here to conceal several stages of repair and addition. This is vernacular rather than Arts and Crafts.



**2.22** The stucco at 320 Maple is similar to #38 Second Street circa 1970, but does not match other houses built in the 1920s. The stucco was not applied against frieze or barge boards at the soffit and floor, but was applied against corner boards, door and window trim. Was this vertical trim installed for wood siding first? This is a strong possibility, since narrow clapboard survives on part of the south wall. On the north side it would weather faster and be a candidate for replacement by stucco. In the 1920's a few, rare examples "International Style" houses were built, but they invariably used a thin, lightly textured stucco similar to that found on the foundation wall of this house. The coarse dimpled texture of the front wall is not seen until after WW2. A few rare houses used Spanish Mission Style, with very coarse and theatrical stucco, but these houses invariably have exposed parapets, "Spanish tile rooflets" and ornamental scuppers. This house is not Mission Style, International style or Arts and Crafts, and does not retain typical details of other significant Oakville examples.



**2.23** Another clue to the age of the stucco is seen at the vertical cleat, east end of the verandah which was probably installed to support insect screens. The stucco has been applied against the girder and out to the face of the corner trim. This suggests that siding or shingles were removed from the wall before the screen porch was contemplated, and stucco was added to the wall at the same time the cleat was nailed into it. The other end of the verandah does not have a similar cleat so makes it more likely that the stucco was not an original finish. Since verandahs offer protection from weather, mechanical damage from chairs and tables, or even hockey sticks may be may have caused siding replacement.



**2.24** “Smooth” stucco, without rustication, on west foundation wall, probably original. Note the deterioration of the stucco indicating insufficient binder in the mix. The block foundation is highly permeable and allows chronic dampness.



**2.25** Stucco finish at south-east corner. This was also applied directly to the substrate without strapping. There was no corner board below the first floor. If stucco was intended for the entire house as a cheaper alternative to siding it is unlikely that they would have used corner boards on the upper walls but omitted them below the first floor. The stucco was applied directly to the foundation wall in a very thin coat. A plasterer would usually apply a scratch coat, and a bond coat before the finish stucco. This single coat is another indication of a poor construction by a speculative builder.



**2.26** Stucco on smooth block foundation at south wall. Texture is similar on west side and north side under the deck. The quality of stucco is uneven suggesting that the plasterer had not done an apprenticeship and was not a tradesman. Textured concrete block with a “stone face” were developed for better quality walls and exposed foundations in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Century. They could have been used here but would have required more expense, and the goal was the cheapest construction possible. The parging stucco is the original finish, and is unlike that of the north wall.



**2.27** Stucco at upper east wall is failing near the corner and soffit in mid-wall. This is a modern synthetic stucco applied recently, as part of a third or fourth refinishing of the walls. This application above first floor siding seems very arbitrary and poorly executed. Patches of the finish are peeling off the substrate under the soffit where the finish should have been protected from weather. This indicates poor preparation, rather than excessive deterioration.



**2.28** View of the exposed rough sawn rafters & roof sheathing. The sheathing has long checks (splits), wane, missing knots and gaps between boards. In high quality Arts & Crafts cottages, the exposed roof sheathing would use clear or #1 grade tongue & groove V-joint pine with the finished side down, visible where exposed to below. This is a poor imitation. The rafter tails of Arts & Crafts buildings were also meant to be seen as finished details. The rafters would be planed, sanded and either profiled with a radius on the bottom edge, or a sculpted termination. These details can be seen in many houses & railway stations built between 1890 and 1914. The rafters here are simply rough sawn sticks of wood that are too deep to match the fascia board. Arts and Crafts Houses aspired to bring the quality workmanship of carpentry back as simple and honest decoration of modest houses. There is none of the quality of workmanship that would qualify this as real Arts and Crafts building.





**2.29** View of North West corner of verandah with vinyl siding, modern synthetic stucco and faux Tudor half-timber, concrete block foundation, and repaired stucco under the soffit. The Porch railing can be seen here, preceded the stucco. A wall cleat was installed to support the railing. This detail is often used where clapboard is installed after the railings, but also where stucco was applied up to the railing, so provides no conclusive proof that siding was or was not used originally.

**2.30** The verandah has three columns supporting the perimeter girder. Architects would take care to align the windows and doors of the front elevation with the column spacing. The two outer columns are nearly symmetrical with the corners of the house, but the middle column is 7' 6" from the column on the west and 13' 11" from the column on the east. This provided a better view through the triple gang window of the living room, but the placement of the center column is not symmetrical either to the window nor to the entry door. It is an arbitrary location.

**2.31** The columns were examined to understand their details. Full height columns typified late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses which had pretensions of classical style. They were not used in Arts and Crafts houses because they compromised the basic design tenet of less ornamentation and reference to humble cottages rather than grand palaces. It would appear that the arbitrary placement and choice of these columns was seen by the builder as a quick way to provide the impression of quality. The girder connecting the columns is built up from dimensional lumber (3/4" x 9-2/8") for the cheeks and (3/4" x 6") for the soffit board with the structural beam concealed inside. The capitals were installed correctly to project equally on both sides of the girder, but the block used for the capital was capped with 1/4 round on the face which gives the impression of extreme delicacy. This may have been done to avoid planing the perimeter of the block which is concealed by the 1/4 round, but the effect is less than fair. The columns have an entasis or taper of 5/8" on each side from bottom to top. The consistency of the turning suggests that they were supplied by a mill that sold complete wooden columns to builders, with bases and caps as a single unit.

**2.32** The interior ceiling of the verandah was finished with a narrow (2") V-joint material that was normally used to line closets and cupboards. Exterior grade V-joint was typically 1/2 or 5/8" thick but this ceiling appears to be under 3/8" thick. The V-joint has shrunk (because it is interior grade) and buckled because it is too thin to bridge the ceiling joists properly. Uneven gaps have opened up where the paint has restrained one joint but allowed the next one to move. This cannot be remedied without taking the entire ceiling down and reinstalling it on a ceiling with more joists. Unfortunately, taking the V-joint down would destroy enough of it to make re-use impractical.



**2.33** View of ceiling with visible shrinkage of the tongue and groove V-match material. Note the heavy checking in the paint which indicates that much of it will have to be removed to bare wood before repainting. The material was not kiln dried when installed. The stucco was applied up to the existing ceiling on the left side. Changes to replace the existing knob and tube connections in the ceiling would be best done from above by removing the roof, a pretty serious intervention.



**2.34** A “floating” rail with moulded hand and foot rails and square pickets was installed between columns. The foot rail is supported at mid span with blocks nailed to the deck to prevent sagging, and allow leaves to be swept clear. The crude blocking of the foot rail telegraphed the subsidence of the corners through the deck to the railing which has a bow of at least 2” along the front rail.



**2.35** The substantial bow in the railing near the north-east corner indicates that more movement is occurring at this corner than across the rest of the verandah. The middle column is higher than both corners.

**2.36** The generously wide flight of wooden steps from column to column is one of the nicest features of the verandah, but the treads have an uneven rise with the bottom tread much too close to the ground. This has probably resulted from a build up of soil from landscaping. The stairs appear tilted now as a result. It is good that a large bush has grown up in front of the verandah because it conceals many of the defects that are obvious up close. It is very difficult to get photographs because of this shrubbery.

**2.37** The verandah deck has tilted downwards at the edge by nearly 3". The porch columns may have had minimal foundations. They were frequently constructed on a couple of concrete blocks set two or three courses below grade. One would not expect a poured concrete foundation since concrete block was used for the house foundation. Subsidence of the footings in the top soil would have allowed the piers to sink resulting in the current slope.

**2.38** If the foundation piers have not subsided, decay at the bottom of the wooden post would allow compression of the structure and subsidence. The wooden "skirt" of trim & ventilation panels are almost flush with the soil. Chronic dampness and rot from the soil will cause rot in the posts or be exacerbated by carpenter ants which

require wood in close proximity to damp soil as a habitat. Damage from the ants is not restricted to their tunnels. The mould spores that they carry into the wood cause the worst decay.

**2.39** Repairing the columns would require shoring the porch and cutting the bottoms off the posts before fitting new scarfed extensions. This would also require raising the deck with jacks to reduce the slope. The problem with lifting the porch is that the nails that held the roof framing tight to the wall, have been pulled away from the sheathing. This can be seen in the gap along the ceiling. Because the nails were driven diagonally into the sheathing (toe-nailing) it is never possible to push them back while the full weight of the roof resists. Nails will have to be sawn off where there is room to insert a saw blade, or the stucco will have to be removed to allow the nails to be cut. Realistically this means pulling the verandah roof far enough away from the wall to work behind it. The top row of sheathing and all of the soffit would need to be removed as well to gain access to the nails & substrate. If the verandah was of a high quality, this would be worth doing.



**2.40** The porch columns are also rotting at their bases and will require removal to replace the base blocks and undertake repairs to the column shafts. Decayed column and rotted base block which does not align with porch wall.

**2.41** The poor quality of the existing structure means that almost anything done to repair it will be of higher quality than what is existing. It makes more sense to replace the porch with a consistently better quality one, than to try to preserve it.



**2.42** Street Elevation. The recent addition of “half timber” detail with synthetic stucco does not convince one that this is an early 20<sup>th</sup>. century house. The “half timber motif” with several “timbers” radiating from the center point is more suggestive of an exposed roof truss. Diagonal braces were used sparingly even in authentic Arts and Crafts revival houses, and never in this manner. Rather than create the impression of medieval “Wattle and Daub” construction with compartmentalized structure, this gable is high, with arbitrary positioning of the diagonals, and a generally “blank” presentation to the street, quite unlike other houses all around it. The little 2” x 4” brackets under the eaves & porch columns are the only features that suggest structural connection between the verge of the roof and the wall. Since this is the principle elevation of the house, and the view that has triggered concern about the appearance of an Arts and Crafts structure, the several failures of detail are evidence that it is not worthy of designation and preservation.



**2.43** Entry door with exterior aluminum storm door. The Pine door is probably contemporary with the construction of the house, but has a single large pane of glass and three narrow panels below. It does not have the detail of an Arts and Crafts house which would have expressed craftsmanship in details such as the window, center rail, the width, quality of the wood used, and panel details. This door is only 1-3/8" thick so is an interior door used where a 1-3/4" or 2-1/4" door should have been placed. The latch set is original but supplemented with a modern deadbolt, letter slot and surface mounted mail box. The window on the stair is a modern vinyl sliding window replacement. Ceiling height is only 92". Once again, the inappropriate use of cheaper materials and poor execution must be understood as a substitution for the qualities of Arts and Crafts Houses that it was trying to emulate.



**2.44** The basement framing is exposed. The joists, blocking and beams were painted but have no ceiling finish. The foundation walls are concrete block, with some signs of movement (staircase cracks). A heavy softwood beam measuring 9" wide x 11-1/4" deep carries the main floor joists. This beam may have had three timber posts originally but is now carried on two adjustable steel jack posts. The joists are roughsawn, and vary from 1-3/4" to 2" in width. They are 7-1/4" deep at 16" on center. The joists span from outside plate to the beam, where they lap those of the other side. They are nailed together at the beam. Two lines of solid 2" x 2" blocking was used to prevent rotation of the joists. The stairwell was "trimmed" with a pair of joists at each end (trimming joists) and a pair of joists along the length of the stairwell (trimmed joist). A hole in the concrete floor at the foot of the stairs indicates that a wooden post was removed. It supported the point load for the landing above. Because the trimming joist no longer has this post below, the load on the 2" x 8" window header (which is right in the middle of the beam) is causing the header to deflect demonstrating that it is overloaded.

**2.45** The furnace and hot water heater are gas fired and high efficiency. The furnace vents through the wall to the exterior. The hot water heater uses the brick chimney to vent. Both are located at the center of the south wall of the basement.

**2.46** The electrical panel (Federal Pioneer) 125 Amp 120/240 is located at the middle of the west wall behind the stairway. It has 28 full and 4 empty slots.

**2.47** Clearance to the underside of the floor joists is only 73-1/2", below the modern OBC minimum. Joists have a clear span of 132 inches from the beam to the exterior wall bearing.

**2.48** The main floor plan is compact and nearly square. The entry door swings towards the stairs blocking the coat hooks when it is open. The builder should have realized that swinging it towards the center bearing wall would have prevented inconvenience. The stairs run in a straight flight to the second floor landing. The sloping roof above the stairs, from the exterior kneewall up towards the ridge, gives this stairwell ceiling an odd shape not found in other houses. Headroom is barely sufficient at the centerline of the stair landing, and as low as 54" on the outside wall.

**2.49** The kitchen lies straight ahead from the hallway. Four doors in the kitchen give it very little useful wall space for cabinetry. The exterior door is also too close to the corner to allow cabinets to fit within the arc of the doorswing. It is apparent that everything was done without a prepared plan.

**2.50** The dining room is accessed directly from the kitchen. It has an original 3 part window on the east wall and a modern sliding window on the south side, where a window would have been more logical in the first place.

**2.51** The living room is separated from the dining room with two tiny wall nibs and a dropped header. One might expect a pair of pocket doors in a dividing wall

from this era, but the builder omitted it, perhaps to save money. The resulting room divisions make them difficult to furnish and use.

**2.52** The second floor is also divided into four small rooms with the bathroom at the head of the stairs. Closets are tucked into corners, one over the entry hall for the first bedroom, the other two back to back at the center of the east wall. The closets are narrow, nearly square with panel doors to minimize lost wall space within the rooms. The encroaching roof from the east and west knee walls reduce the full height floor space by 44" on either side of the house.



**2.53** Second floor hallway is less than 36" wide. Attic hatch beyond light.

**2.54** The fir floors have been refinished and sealed, providing a pleasant traditional appearance to the upstairs rooms. Door and window trim is typical of the post war era with plain jambs & heads, a single bead across the junction of the heads and a slightly beveled cornice projecting above. Baseboards are 7" high with a simple bevel at the cap.

**2.55** The attic hatch is located in the corridor, but was not accessed for this investigation. The small size of all the rooms was typical of the early 20<sup>th</sup>. century but does not allow the accumulation of furniture and equipment that are expected in a contemporary house, especially in this part of Oakville.

### **3.00 Analysis:**

**3.01** The house is a simple vernacular side hall house typical of the post WW1 era. It's details make a slight reference to several historic "types" but are inconsistent across the façade. Materials at the second floor are mostly replacements with modern stucco and wood trim. Materials at the sides of the house are also modern replacements with vinyl siding, synthetic stucco and spruce wood trim . The only elements which should be of potential significance are those of the street elevation below the verandah roof. Unfortunately these details are not significant and cannot be considered significant for preservation , for the following reasons.:

a). The bracket details refer to the Arts and Crafts movement but are both crude and paired with exposed rafter ends that have no custom detail and are half hidden by a fascia board.

b). The "classical " columns refer to classic revival and were replaced in Arts and Crafts houses by innovative carpenter designed "half" columns on masonry plinths, or solid masonry plinths to the underside of the girder. The columns are not spaced in a logical manner and are not centered on openings. The base and capital details are minimized in scale, difficult to appreciate at a distance, and would not have been used in this manner in an Arts and Crafts House. They were probably chosen as catalogue items simply to save time in construction.

c). It was not possible to determine whether the stucco is original to the house or applied considerably later as replacement for cheap wooden siding that failed rapidly all round the house. The poor quality of other finishes suggests that the original clapboard failed within two or three decades. The heavy "rusticated" stucco with the crudely formulaic and heavy downward swirl, appears to have been chosen as an unsupervised experiment by an itinerant plasterer. The stucco on the lower facade contradicts the appearance of other sides of the house, and other elements of this elevation.

**3.02** Summarizing the north elevation on Maple, the crude and unplanned combination of elements does not justify its inclusion as an historic example of Arts

and Crafts on the heritage list. In the absence of other coherent design elements, it is a pastiche of badly conceived components. See Drawings, Pages 30, 31, 32.

**3.03** It is clear that the house was not designed by an architect. The rooms are cramped. The windows and doors do not align with each other vertically, and were located to suit by interior room layouts. Details such as the opening between the living and dining rooms that would have appropriate hardwood trim and balanced composition are unfinished and irregular from one side of the room to the other. The jambs are The rear porch and deck were constructed from salvaged materials, including old storm windows, by person(s) with little carpentry skill. This elevation can only be described as “picturesque” as it is similar to what one would expect in a shack on a farm. The arbitrary off center exterior brick chimney is also an expedient without architectural merit.

**3.04** Design features are not archetypal, or exemplary in execution. The quality of the details is fair to poor in every case, substituting cheapness for quality, and expediency for skilled workmanship. Brackets, soffits, rafter tails, corner trim were all made from rough sawn construction grade or economy lumber without any effort to plane or shape the pieces to a smooth and consistent finish. The brackets have wane, rough sawn fibres, and obvious gaps, poorly concealed under many layers of paint. Loose knots, checks, wane, and gaps caused by shrinkage of green lumber can be seen in the soffits of the verandah and main roof, and rafter tails. A sub-fascia of was omitted and the fascia used is too small to cover the rafter tails on the verandah. The work is shoddy. Rafter spacing was inconsistent, an jarring deficiency where they are exposed and visible.

**3.05** Exterior materials were poorly finished, located without plan or proportion, and do not meet the standards of other good local examples. The railings were not installed level and have sagged in the middle. The storm windows on the single hung sash do not match the layout of the muntin bars behind. .

**3.06** While the appearance of the house from a distance is pleasant , the poor quality is apparent when viewed up close, the property. The defects include checking, wane, missing knots, large coarse knots some of them on the edges of the stock, gaps between warped & shrunken boards that were installed green, nails driven through the stock from the other side (rough sawn roof soffits). The brackets are actually imitations of brackets. Traditional Arts and Crafts brackets would have housed and shouldered blind tenons at the compression braces, and exposed or even projecting pegs to emphasize the joinery. Arts and Crafts brackets had at least three basic parts, the wall cleat, the compression brace and the horizontal beam that carries the projecting load of roof, bay or other feature. These imitation brackets are clearly made from two chunks of 2 x 4 lumber with waney edges, nailed together to simulate a solid beam and compression brace. The brackets do not have wall cleats. The (3) brackets are insufficient for the proportion of the gable. There would be (5) or even (7) brackets on Arts and Crafts gables of this sort, as examined next page.

**3.07** The window details are also more recent than the apparent age of the house. The storm windows on the living room have four large horizontal panes that were typical of windows post WW2. Similar sash have been found on a duplex built in 1960, as a sort of Prairie School (Frank Lloyd Wright) Revivalism that was mildly popular towards the end of this famous architect's life. The second floor windows are aluminum 1/1 units made to cover the original openings. The entry door is also a misplaced simulant, a typical light duty exterior door with a large single pane in the upper third, over three narrow panels below. These doors were common from about 1947 to 1958. This may be an early example from the 1920's but would not have been used by an architect for the front door of an Arts and Crafts House. The entry door was typical a heavy oak door with more detail applied to the windows and trim, to create a sense of quality. This door is a builders attempt to substitute a cheap back door instead of using a quality entry door. It does not deserve preservation.



**3.08** Contemporary Arts and Crafts house, Watson Avenue, Oakville. Note the (5) carefully spaced brackets with fretsawn solid struts and jointed blocks in the upper gable. The verandah  $\frac{3}{4}$  columns on masonry plinths are also carefully spaced and fitted to the deck so the center two columns align with the middle brackets above. The house offers a symmetrical façade except where the interior plan places the door to the hallway off center. This house was probably designed by an architect and incorporates neat details like the ventilation louver for the attic space.

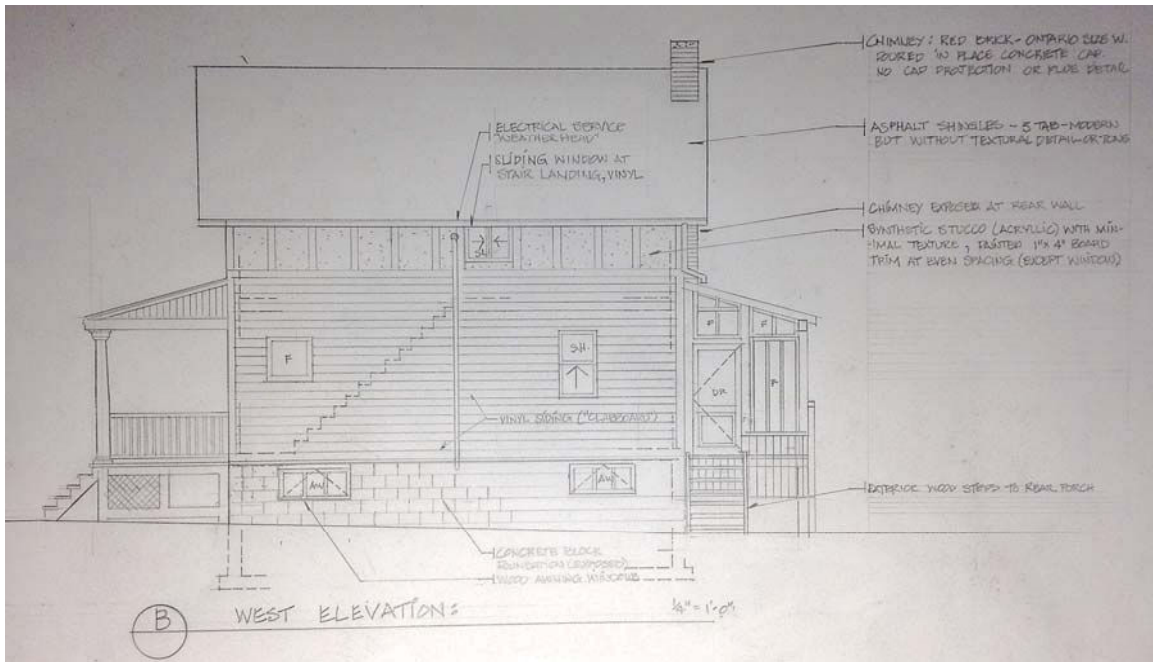
**3.09** Each and every item examined is inferior in quality, execution and detail. Proportions and balance were not present in the design indicating that it was not professionally prepared. Things like window locations adjusted to allow the chimney to be built more cheaply outside the house, indicate that the primary decisions were based on profit. The house was small for its lot, even when first built.

**3.10** Research at the Oakville Historical Society found no indication that the house was built or occupied by a family or individual who was significant in the community. While it is part of the Tuxedo Park development, this association is purely geographic, not historic.

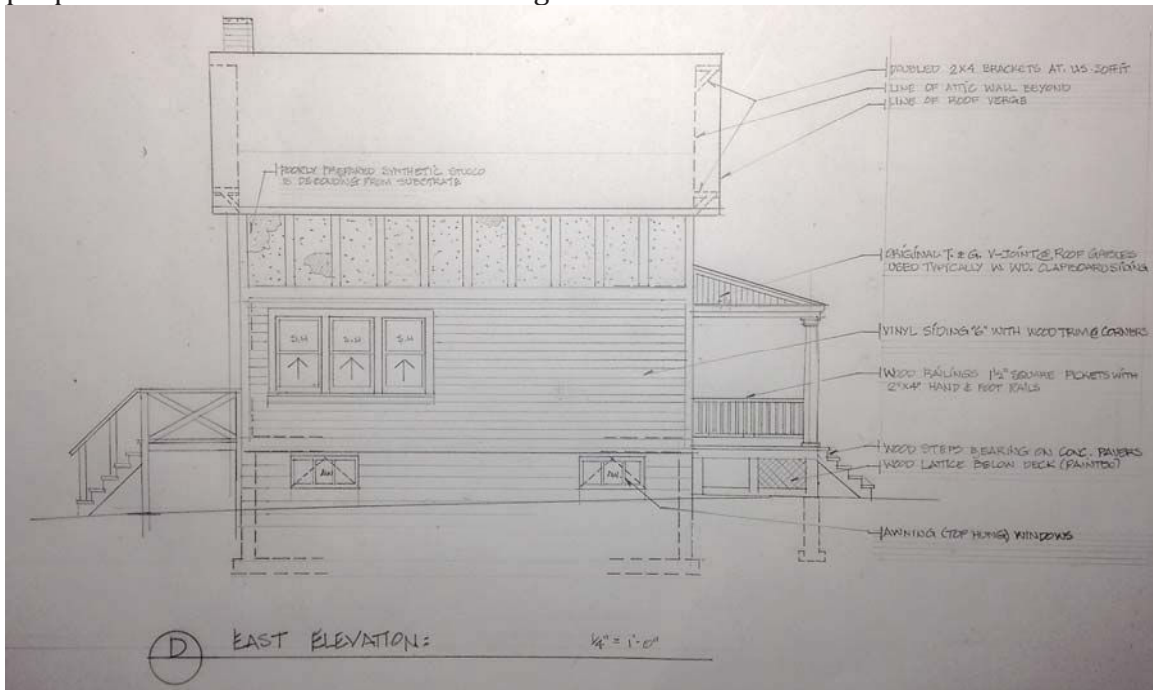
**3.11** Elevations and Plans are reproduced here as individual details with annotations.



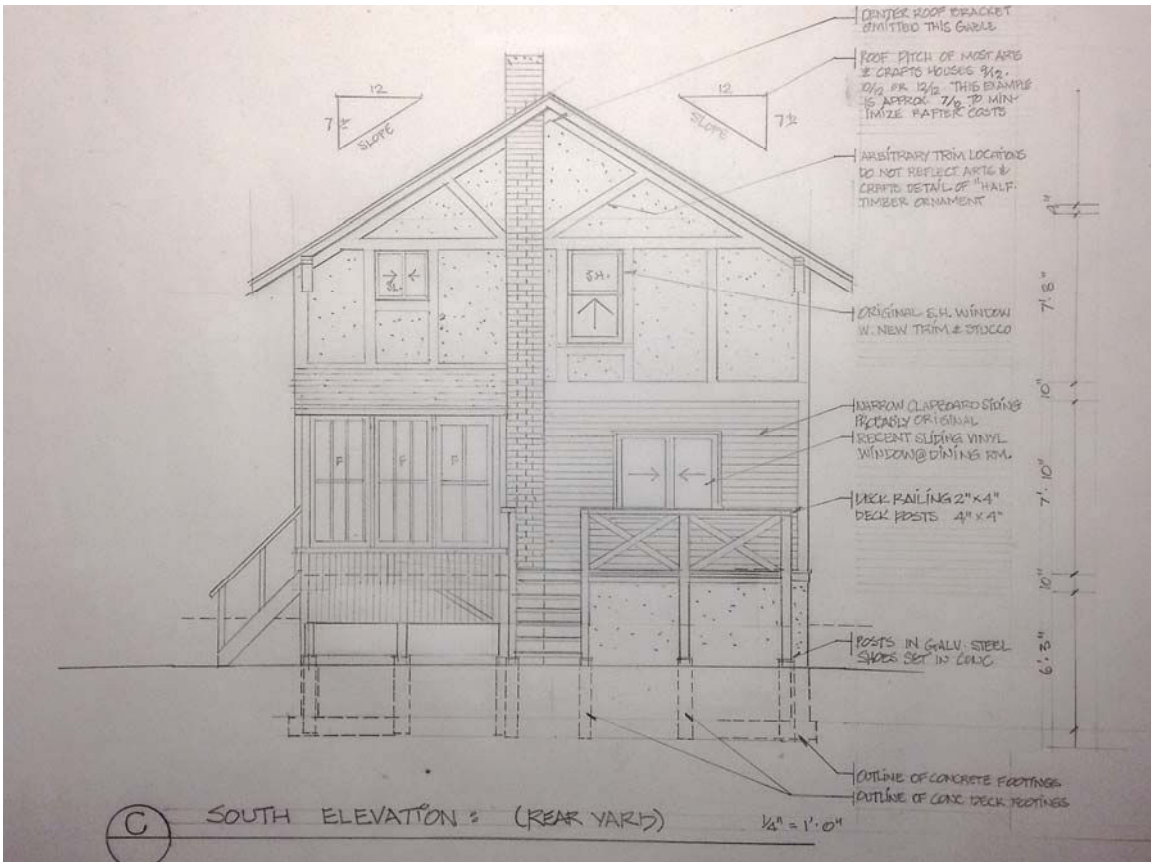
**3.12 North Elevation facing Maple Avenue. Trees & shrubs removed for clarity.** Almost all of the finishes including the stucco is not original. The porch and brackets are probably original, but are were installed without an understanding of Arts and Crafts buildings or even Classical Revival traditions.



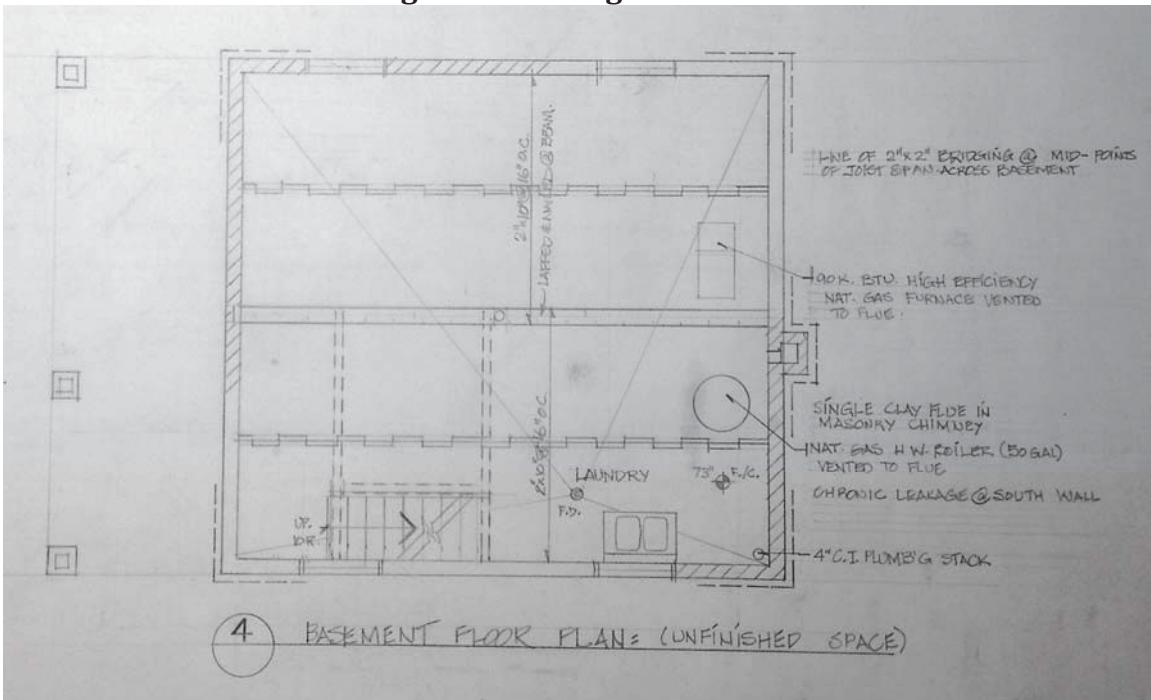
**3.13 West elevation along driveway to rear garage.** Note steady slope of grade towards the back wall which is near the lowest point of the lot and surrounding properties. This causes chronic flooding of the basement.



**3.14 East Elevation with rear porch and front verandah.** Note original dining room window and deteriorating modern trim & synthetic stucco at second floor.

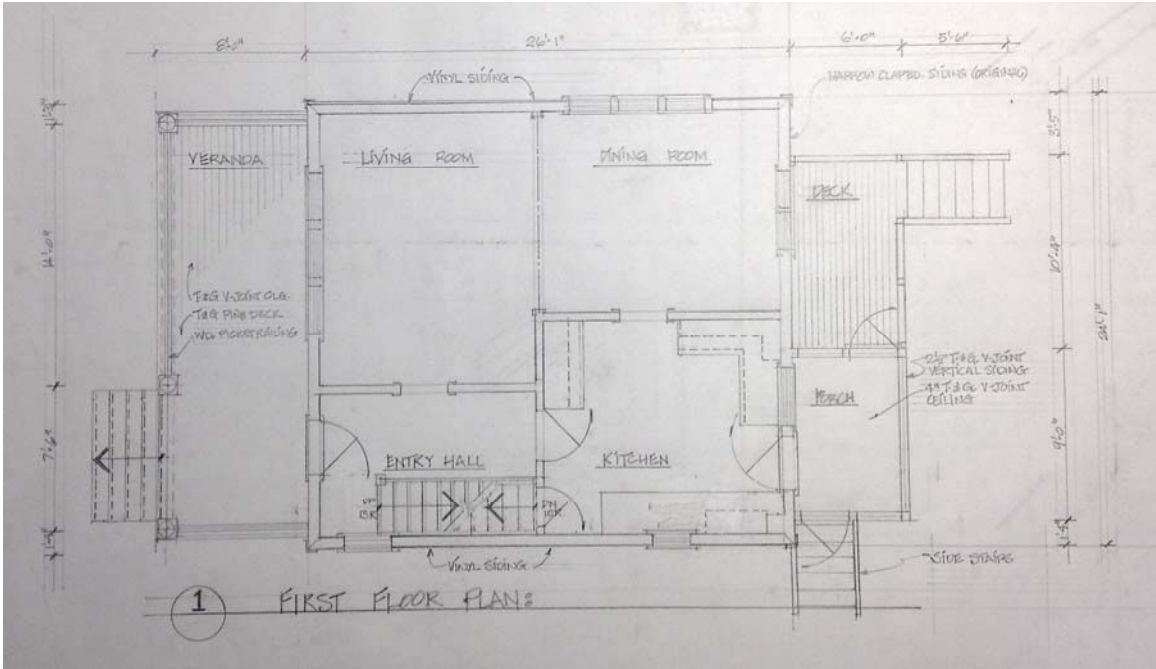


3.15 South elevation (visible to several neighbours), with external chimney, various additions and changes with salvaged & new materials at several times.

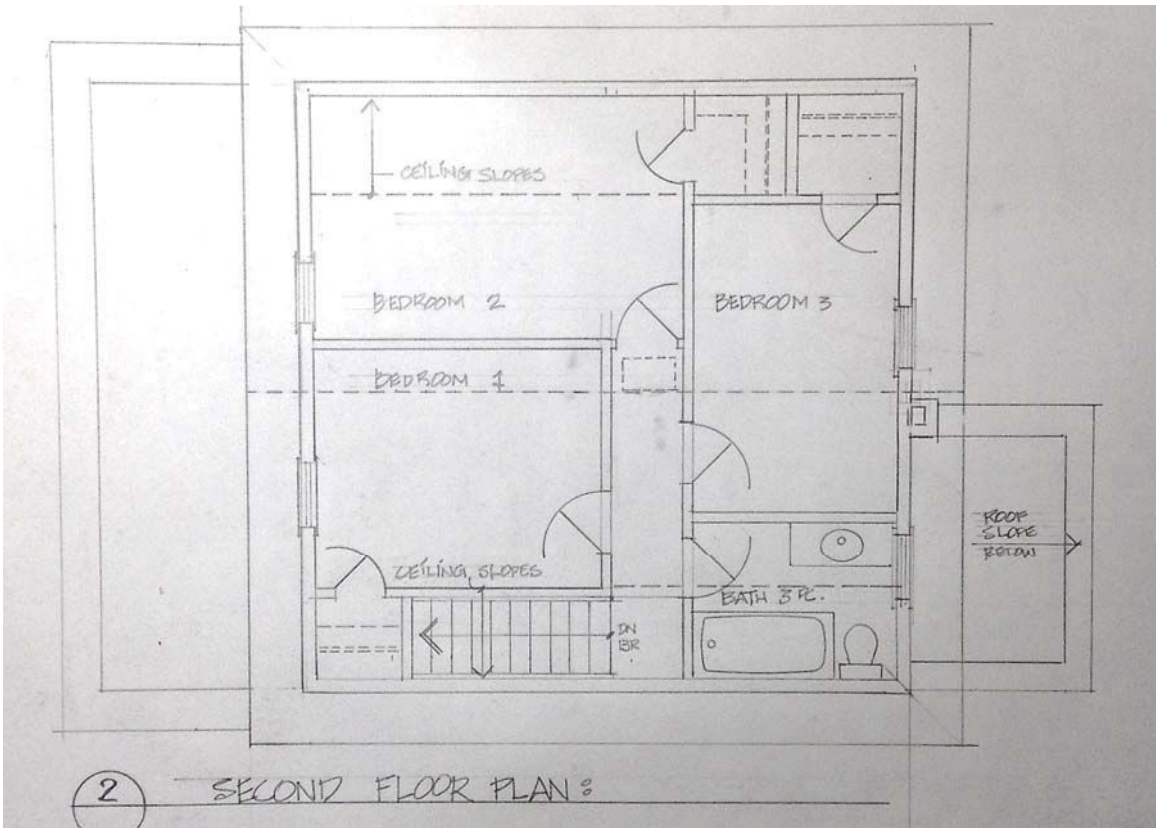


3.16 Basement plan with notations of framing & foundations. Ceiling height is only 6' 3". Chronic flooding brings water through the block wall at the rear.

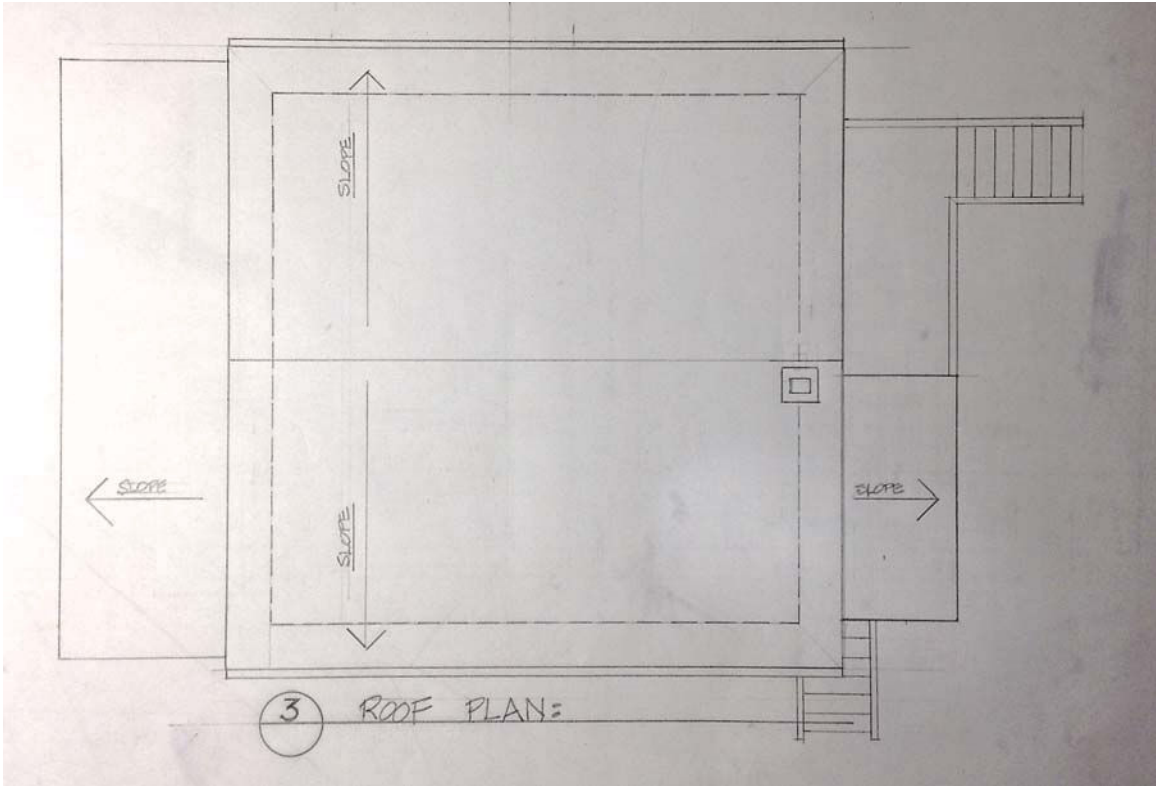




**3.17 First floor plan, verandah, interior room layout, porch, deck, & dimensions.**



**3.18 Second floor plan with interior layout & roofs below.**



**3.19 Roof plan:**

#### 4.00 Conclusion:

This house at 320 Maple Avenue is included on the Oakville Heritage List. Was it included because of exterior architectural attributes; ie. the front porch, stucco and general impression that it is similar to other fine examples of Arts and Crafts design? Examination of each detail and aspect of the building shows that it was not designed by an architect who understood the language of Arts and Crafts or even good vernacular building of the early twentieth century. The builder did not understand or respect the principles of good quality workmanship or coherent design. The builder who building a "spec." house to maximize profit with the bare minimum of character. The house has substandard floor heights (less than eight feet on first floor, 6'-3" in the cellar and low knee walls (54") at the second floor. The stairwell is squeezed under the diminishing roof slope at the second floor landing.

The "doorway" between dining and living room has 2-1/2" jambs which are too small to trim properly. The interior layout, drainage, insulation, and especially electrical service are substandard except for a new high efficiency furnace. None of this is relevant to inclusion on the heritage list, but all factors constrain how the house is lived in and what might be done to improve it. The floor heights and chronic flooding from the rear yard make it very difficult to consider an addition because extensions of the floors would have to follow the substandard interior dimensions. The low side walls also make it very difficult to construct additions on the side of the house which has the greatest side yard setback. The balloon frame appears to have been built without fire stops at the second floor, and cannot be retrofitted with a fire rated ceiling at the basement due to the low clearance. The house would experience rapid flame spread through the walls and destruction in a fire at the basement or first floor. This owner has installed five P.O.C. detectors to give his family as much warning as possible to escape via the single stair to exit.

The exterior wall finishes, which are the only features visible from the street were probably narrow clapboard as per the remaining section of the south wall. The side walls were replaced with vinyl clapboard, the second floor was re-clad with synthetic stucco and trim. This finish is failing after less than 20 years due to high humidity or poor insulation within the wall. The wall behind the front porch was refinished in cement stucco at some point after construction, most likely after WW2 when the narrow clapboard had failed on the most exposed (north) side. The only part of the house with original siding is at the rear elevation, unseen from the street.

Staircase cracks in the block foundation also indicate movement of the foundation. Vertical movement will occur if frozen soil adhering to the block lifts a portion of the wall relative to an adjoining section. Since more heat escapes through the middle of a wall than at the corners, frost adhesion is usually worse at the corners. This is seen in the basement corners. The block walls have been "jacked" vertically by the outside soil, resulting in structural failure of the foundation and leakage through the block. The furnace is located at the middle of the south

foundation wall below the back porch, which keeps the soil outside thawed in colder weather than the soil at the corners. Repairs would require excavating the entire foundation to the footings, to allow repointing, parging, installation of weeping tile and a drainage layer. This is an expensive repair that will add not space and no increase in value to the house.

Original single hung sash windows in gangs of three, found at the living and dining room, were retrofitted with storm windows that have a completely different pattern of horizontal panes and muntins. Various cheap aluminum and vinyl sliding windows have been retrofitted at the dining room, kitchen, upstairs bathroom and upper hall landing. A collection of salvaged storm windows from an old house were used to build a ramshackle back porch that is fortunately unseen from the street.

The electrical service has used every available breaker on the small panel, and some of the knob and tube wiring must be replaced entirely to upgrade the rooms that are served.

Plumbing is a mixture of cast iron, A.B.S., copper, brass and possibly galvanized pipe. This is common in old houses but reaches a point where leakage is virtually guaranteed, particularly where zinc is in a galvanic cycle with copper and brass. To replace all of the plumbing would mean gutting a substantial part of the house, including finishes to ceilings and walls.

If the owner undertakes extensive repairs to improve plumbing, wiring, insulation and finishes they will still be constrained by the overall poor construction of the framing and substandard floor heights which have a serious impact on future use and appeal to another generation.

The house should definitely not be designated as it is a poor example of housing from the early twentieth century and does not represent significant design construction, materials, or connection with historic figures or events. It should also be removed from the heritage list to allow the owners freedom of choice in what they will be allowed to inhabit and modify. The owners have lived in the house for seven years and wish to remain in the neighbourhood where their daughter attends school. They request that the house be removed from the Oakville Heritage List after your careful consideration of this Report.

Prepared by Tom Murison, Restoration Consultant. April 16, 2018.