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RODNEY & BLAKE STREETS Walking Tour

Heritage Barrie was established in 1977 by a City of Barrie bylaw as the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) under the Ontario Heritage Act. Its role is to advise Council in heritage conservation matters and to implement the heritage policy of the Official Plan. Members are volunteers appointed by council, a councilman, and a liaison from the Planning Department.

The Rodney Blake Street walking Tour is a self-guided tour sponsored by Heritage Barrie to highlight the architectural and historical heritage of the City of Barrie.

For more information:

Heritage Barrie
www.heritagebarrie.com

Barrie City Hall
705-726-4242
www.barrie.ca

Barrie Public Library
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www.library.barrie.on.ca

Barrie Visitor and Convention Bureau
1-800-668-9100
www.tourismbarrie.com

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St. Vincent Park

St. Vincent Park is within a block of land bounded by Kempenfelt Bay and Duckworth, Napier, and Puget Streets. This block was first set aside as a land reserve for the Northwest Fur Trade Company. In the 1840s, in order to provide an "extension of the Town of Barrie", the Crown had the block surveyed into government Plan 6. St. Vincent Park was marked on that original plan as St. Vincent Square and has been a popular location ever since. At one time, residents and tourists gathered there to enjoy concerts at the bandstand (since demolished). Occasionally, Aboriginal people from the Rama Reserve camped in the park and sold handcrafted baskets.

In 1844, James Robert Gowan purchased most of the lots on the north and south sides of Blake Street, west of the park. Gowan served as the first county court judge in Simcoe County. Among other impressive accomplishments, he also acted as an advisor to the Hon. John A. MacDonald on the care and nurturing of the newly created Canada. Gowan built his first residence, Ardraven, on his property on the south side of Blake Street. By 1855, Senator Gowan was occupying his second residence, known as Ardraven II, on the same location.

1



42 Blake Street

On the north side of Blake Street, Gowan built the cottage at 42 Blake Street for his coachman. Walking west along Blake from the park, this cottage appears as the one storey red and black brick house with the decorative porch nearest to the street. It is all that remains of the once prominent Gowan properties.

On the south side of Blake, west of Ardraven, was the Strathy residence, Ovenden. Now demolished, this residence served as a private school for ladies known as Ovenden College.

Before the construction of Highway 400, travellers heading north from Toronto had to follow Yonge Street and Highway 11 through downtown Barrie. There they often were delayed for hours by long lines of traffic. By the time they reached the east end, many were ready to stop for a picnic or to find somewhere to stay for the night. In the late 1920's, 81 Blake Street was used as the office for a tourist home known as Homestead Cabins (now demolished). Homestead advertised "inner spring mattresses, free showers, free cooking, swimming, [and called themselves] a nice old-fashion garden spot". Immediately east was another tourist operation called Lakeside Cabins.

2



99 Blake Street

The attractive residence at 99 Blake Street was built in the 1870s. One early occupant was a gardener, Edward Justice, whose greenhouse operation stood to the west of the house. Although modest in size, this house exhibits one of the more ambitious examples of decorative brickwork in Barrie. A new porch was added in the 1990's.

3



103 Blake Street

At the southwest corner of Blake and Rodney is 103 Blake Street. This lovely building is believed to have been built in 1886 by Mr. H.B. Spotton. Spotton was the Principal of the Grammar School and Barrie Collegiate Institute from 1868 to 1891. The house was later owned by another Principal, Mr. Redditt.

4



11 Rodney Street

To view 11 Rodney it is necessary to cross Blake Street and walk south on the east side of Rodney. Set back from the street is this Tudoresque Queen Anne style house that was once known as Glen Ormond. This stately residence was built in 1895 for John Dickinson, who had a career as a civil engineer, surveyor, and lawyer. For \$3500, Dickinson had George Ball construct the residence according to the design of a local architect Eustace Bird. In 1910, T.D. Rees, the head of a lumber company in New Orleans, Louisiana, purchased Glen Ormond for use as a summer home. Each year Rees and his family, accompanied by their domestic staff, travelled to Barrie in a private railcar. In 1929, Rees sold the property at public auction, complete with furnishings and boats. During World War II, it was rumoured that a gambling den was in operation in the basement. (This may explain the iron doors, false floor in the vault, painted wall mural, and bar that remain in the basement!)

5



113 Blake Street

Looking south to Kempenfelt Bay, it is easy to understand why the Bay has always been the "jewel" of Lake Simcoe and Barrie. Properties such as Glen Ormond enjoyed an unrestricted view of the Bay and boasted their own private bathing beaches.

Returning to the southeast corner of Blake and Rodney, the house at 113 Blake was built for the gardener at Glen Ormond.

6

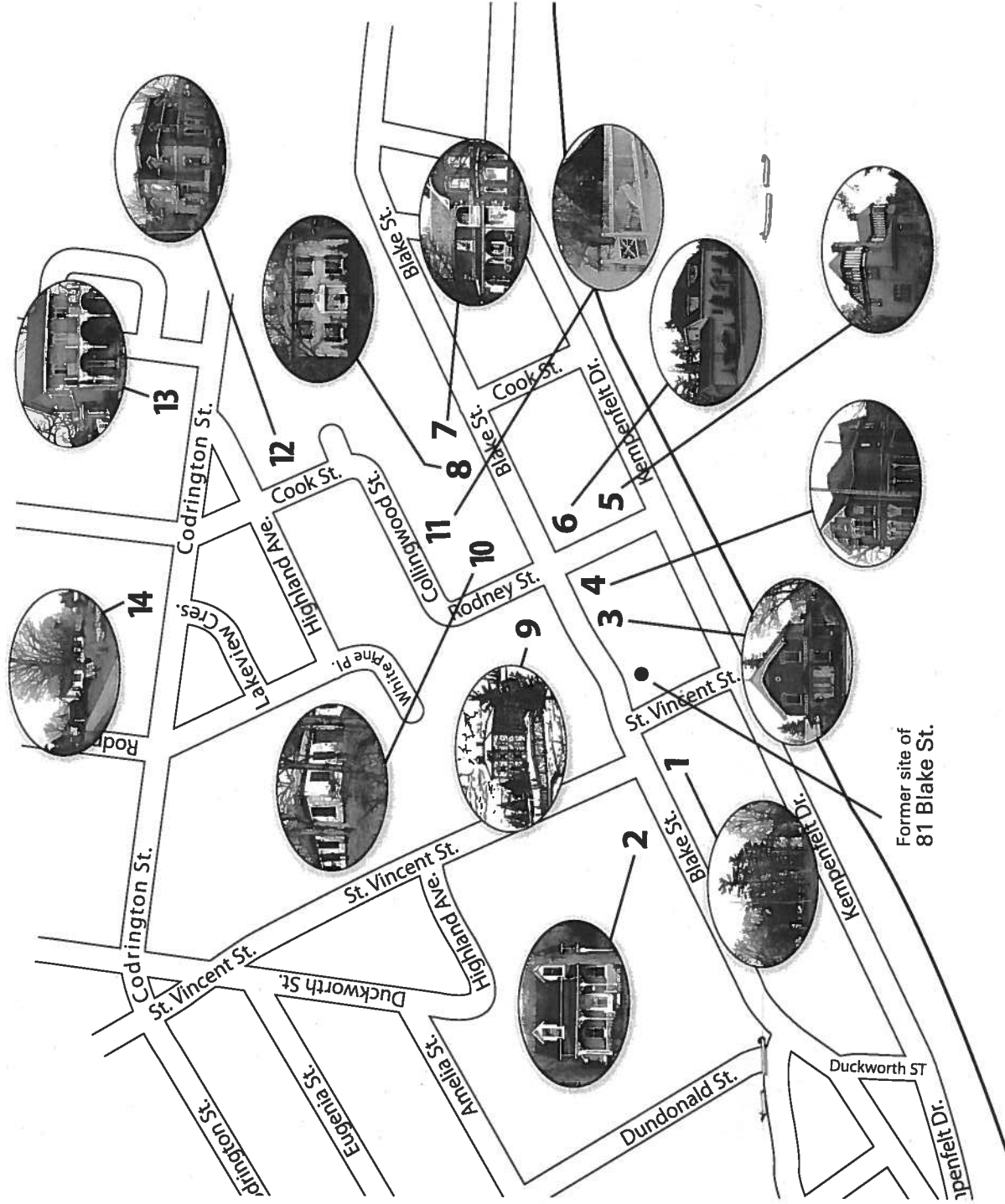


134 Blake Street

Walking east along the south side of Blake reveals the attractive Gothic Revival style residence on the north side at 134 Blake. The first house on the site was built by a banker, William Holt. Holt sold the property in 1874. Sometime later the building was destroyed, probably by fire. Holt himself was found floating in the Bay in 1882, the apparent victim of an unsolved drowning "accident". Two years later, James Pugh acquired the property and immediately built the house that stands today.

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RODNEY & BLAKE STREETS

walking tour map

- 1 St. Vincent Park
- 2 42 Blake St.
- 3 99 Blake St.
- 4 103 Blake St.
- 5 11 Rodney St.
- 6 113 Blake St.
- 7 134 Blake St.
- 8 126 Blake St.
- 9 Barrie Collegiate Institute Site
- 10 47 Rodney St.
- 11 Fence Barn On Collingwood St.
- 12 142 Collingwood St.
- 13 310 Codrington St.
- 14 268 Codrington St.

126 Blake Street

Many of the original buildings constructed in this area were associated in some way with the Barrie Grammar School. The first headmaster, Frederic Gore, financed the operation of the school through grants and fees. He supplemented his personal income by providing accommodation for the boarding students. By 1856, Gore had constructed the outstanding Georgian style building at 126 Blake as a boarding house and office. On an upstairs window the words: "M. Gaviller inhabited this room Sept 1858. M.G." can still be seen. Gaviller was a student who later became an architect and surveyor.

The Lake Simcoe Motel to the west was founded by the Smith family. Initially a simple picnic pavilion, the Smiths added tourist cabins and expanded the facility into the present motel operation.

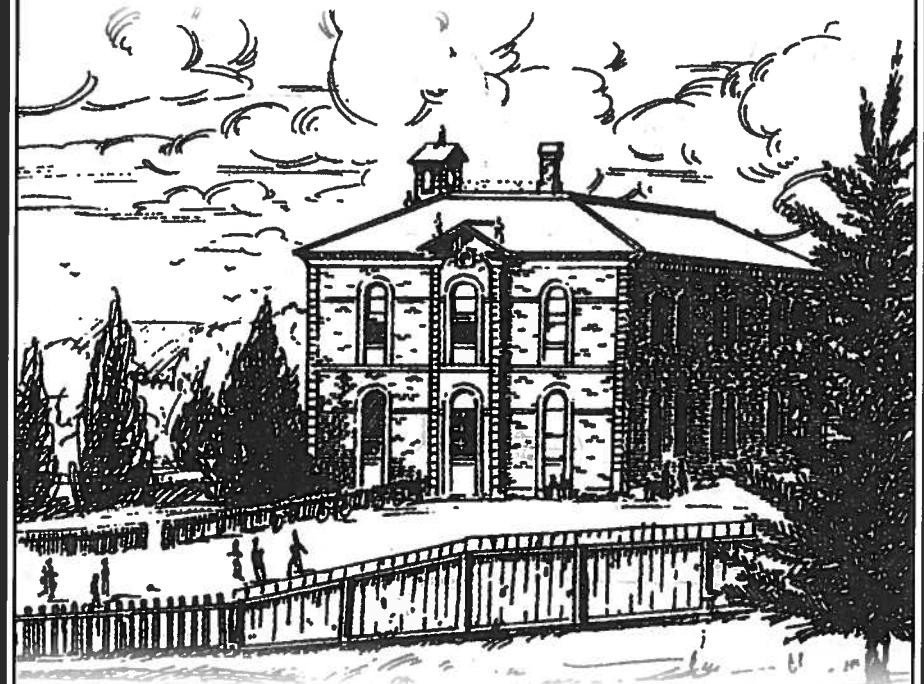
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Barrie Collegiate Institute Site

From 1849 until 1916, the view looking northwest from the intersection of Blake and Rodney was that of the Barrie Grammar School, Barrie Collegiate Institute is recreated from a photograph dated about 1910. It details the Collegiate building which was constructed in 1879 in front of the original 1849 school. The complex burned at Christmas, 1916. The school was relocated to the present Dunlop Street West site of Barrie Central Collegiate Institute. The burned ruins remained standing for many years.

9



47 Rodney Street

In 1849, Frederic Gore, headmaster for the Grammar School, built the Regency Cottage style residence at 47 Rodney Street, now directly behind the Lake Simcoe Motel. Gore resided there with his wife and, sometimes, as many as twenty-five-out-of-town boarding students. In 1863, the building became the home of Benjamin Walker Smith, first sheriff of Simcoe County. In a dramatic rescue on July 1, 1859, Smith saved the lives of the Hon. John A. Macdonald first Prime Minister of Canada and other dignitaries when their steamer, the Ploughboy, drifted dangerously close to rocks during a storm on Georgian Bay.

Continuing north on Rodney, then east along Collingwood, reveals another relic. The barn belongs to the Gore/Smith residence and replaced one which burned in 1915. Observing the flames from Glen Ormond, David Rees rushed to the site. Grabbing a ladder and fire axe, Rees cut a hole in the roof of the summer kitchen. He ordered a firefighter to direct a

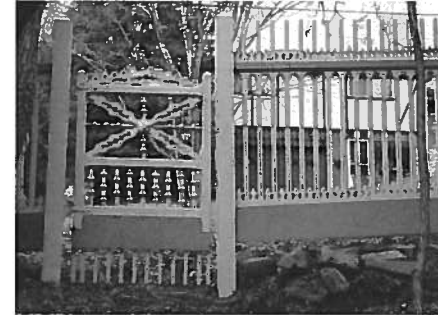
hose into the roof and prevented the fire from spreading to the house. Barns were once common in Barrie. Now only a few examples remain. (photo next page)

10



Fence/Barn on Collingwood Street

Although not original to its present location, the attractive wood fence adjoining the barn dates to about 1850. The solid boards along the base are called pig boards. These were designed to keep stray pigs from entering the yard around the house!



11



142 Collingwood Street

At the top of the hill, at 142 Collingwood Street, is the Second Empire style mansion built by dentist Charles Bosanko. Many of the finest homes in Barrie were built on natural ridges of land and faced south to command a sweeping view of Kempenfelt Bay. Dr. Bosanko built his residence, which once featured a centre tower with a mansard roof and iron cresting, in 1879. Unfortunately, he soon found commuting to his dental practice on Collier Street too difficult and sold the house. The Carriage stone on the lawn bears the name Beverly Hall, which is believed to be an early name for the Bosanko residence.

To the north of 142 Collingwood is the small park at the intersection of Cook, Codrington, and Highland Avenue. The site was marked on government Plan 6 as Codrington Place.

12



310 Codrington Street

On the north side of Codrington Street facing the eastern end of the park, is the delightful structure at 310 Codrington. This home probably was built in 1874 by a local printer, Alexander Laurie.

13



268 Codrington Street

Walking west reveals another of the oldest houses in Barrie. Captain William Grubbe built the modest home at 268 Codrington about 1851. It was likely the first house built in the area known as "The Commons", and is the only one placed at a considerable distance from the street. Captain Grubbe was born in England in 1812 and entered the service of the East India Company when in his teens. In 1845, he was promoted to the rank of captain for his bravery in storming a citadel in India. Two years later, he and his family settled in Barrie. Trained at a time when cameras were rare, Captain Grubbe was skilled at accurately portraying landscapes. In 1853, he painted a watercolor that remains the earliest known panoramic view of Barrie. This water colour is preserved at the Simcoe County Archives in Midhurst.

Codrington Public School was built in 1950 on portions of several lots. The area on the east was a field used for grazing livestock, as well as market gardening. To the West, the land was part of a Presbyterian cemetery. Across the southern boundary was the Lloyd/Brock estate.

14



The Lloyd/Brock estate stretched from Rodney to St. Vincent and was centred approximately on present day Whitepine Place. Shortly after he acquired the property in 1846, Thomas Lloyd built a house near the St. Vincent St. end. In 1901, Montague Leeds purchased the estate. He sold it to Miss Anna Brock of Toronto in 1921. Three sisters, known as the Misses Brock, renovated the house into a summer home. The residence was demolished in the 1970s. Today, many of the exotic plants, French lilac bushes, apple trees, and other flowering shrubs from the once extensive gardens grow wild in the area.

Continuing west on Codrington and then south on Duckworth Street, it is difficult to imagine that, from 1850 to 1907, the area east of Duckworth and St. Vincent was the site of a Presbyterian cemetery. Long time local residents can recall the abandoned cemetery and headstones are occasionally found nearby.

While walking south on the east side of St. Vincent Street watch for evidence of the former entranceway to the Lloyd/Brock estate. It is located just south of 33 St. Vincent, a 1980's phenomenon: a high efficiency R2000 house.

The northeast corner of St. Vincent and Blake was once the site of the Dr. John Ardagh residence, Boulderfel. Built by Dr. Ardagh about 1860, the house was occupied in the twentieth century by the Lay family. Mrs. Lay was the sister of Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Boulderfel was demolished to accommodate the townhouses and apartment building now on the site.

This tour through Barrie's history comes to an end at St. Vincent Park.

