

Heritage Designation Brief



The Cluxton-Stevenson Building

390-392 George Street North

Peterborough Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee

2025

Heritage Designation Status Sheet

Street Address: 390-392 George Street North

Roll Number: 040100068000000

Short Legal Description: LT D PL 100 TOWN OF
PETERBOROUGH EXCEPT R436621;
S/T INTEREST IN M46428 ;
PETERBOROUGH CITY

PACAC Application Review Date: October 7, 2025

Heritage Type: Built Structure

Designation Type: Ontario Heritage Act – Part IV

Designation Brief Completed Date: July 2025

Designation Brief Completed by: Emily Hamilton

Comments:

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST

The subject property has been researched and evaluated to determine its cultural heritage significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990 (the Act). A property is eligible for designation if it has physical, historical, associative or contextual value and meets **any two** of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. Staff have determined that 390-392 George Street North meets criteria and has cultural heritage value or interest and merits designation under the Act.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:

- i. is a rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method:**

390-392 George Street North is an example of an Italianate style commercial building. The style was commonly used for commercial buildings in this period. This property demonstrates key elements of the style including a heavy ornamental cornice and rounded sash windows with decorative hoods.

- ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit:**

The property displays a high degree of craftsmanship in its decorative elements, executed to a high standard of quality. Of particular merit are the window hoods on 392 George Street North.

- iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement:**

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

2. The property has historical value or associative value because it:

- i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community:**

390-392 George Street has direct association with the two prominent businesspeople who commissioned its construction, James Stevenson and William Cluxton. Both men represented the area federally as members of parliament.

- ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture:**

This property yields information that contributes to an understanding of the business community of Peterborough through its association with its tenants such as chemist Herbert Edmison and clothier Thomas C. Elliot, who operated a department store at both addresses from 1908-1920.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant to the community:

The architect and builder of this building are not known.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of the area:

The property maintains the commercial character of the surrounding area, which is dominated by nineteenth-century three- and four-storey brick structures built to the lot line. The building is a contributing heritage resource to the historic cultural landscape of Peterborough's commercial downtown.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:

390-392 George Street is visually, functionally and historically linked to its surroundings as part of the three-storey commercial row of buildings along the east side of George Street. In particular, the building is physically and visually linked to 394 George Street North. The subject property shares specific architectural features with this building, including the sash windows and wooden hood moulds, surmounted by a cornice, which is characteristic of commercial architecture in downtown Peterborough.

iii. is a landmark: O. Reg. 9/06, s. 1 (2).

This property's distinctive architectural features make it a well-known building and easily recognized building in the city's downtown.

Design and Physical Value

390-392 George Street North has design and physical value as a historic three storey commercial building with main level store fronts in Peterborough's downtown core. It was likely constructed in the 1860s, after the Great Fire of 1861 which destroyed most buildings on the block bordered by George, Simcoe, Water and Hunter Street. Its construction was funded by James Stevenson and William Cluxton, two prominent businesspeople of the day. It is of the Italianate style, a popular choice for commercial buildings. It displays several characteristics of this style including rounded windows with decorative hoods surmounted by a heavy ornamental cornice.

The Italianate style was one of several historicist architectural styles which emerged in the early eighteenth century in the United Kingdom. It drew inspiration from sixteenth century Italian Renaissance architecture. The style was originally inspired by the design of Tuscan country villas and details like the *campanili*, – the square, hip roofed towers that often-overlooked Italian village squares or piazzas. Architect Charles Barry popularized the style in the 1830s using the Italianate design vocabulary in the design of a variety of public buildings. The Italianate style came to North America in the late 1840s where architects like Alexander Jackson Davis produced pattern books of Italianate and Gothic Revival designs for domestic architecture. The style first appeared in Ontario in the 1860s. It arrived in more remote urban centres in the 1870s and continued to be popular until the 1890s. It became a widely popular choice for domestic architecture at the beginning of the 1860s, partly because of its adaptability. The catalogue of design elements could be incorporated into buildings of all sizes and types. In addition, with no rigid historical antecedents to follow, as the Georgian and Neoclassical styles required, architects were afforded more creativity and adaptability. By the end of its popularity at the close of the nineteenth century, a 'pure' Italianate design would be an unusual building in most urban centres.

A main aspect of the Italianate style is that while it is not ornate, it is highly decorated. One defining feature that became ubiquitous are paired eave brackets. Other common features include tall, narrow windows, arched windows, paired windows, quoins, overhanging eaves, and cupolas.

390-392 George Street North demonstrates several features of the Italianate style including a heavy ornamental cornice supported by groups of brackets. The decorative window hoods on the façade of 392 George Street North are a unique element which shows the adaptability of the style and reflects the eclectic taste of the Victorians.

Historical and Associative Value

The current brick building at 390-392 George Street North was likely constructed in the mid-late 1860s in the aftermath of a devastating fire which destroyed most of the block bordered by George, Simcoe, Water and Hunter Streets. The town's thriving lumber industry allowed the block to be rebuilt quickly and many of the landmark three storey brick commercial buildings date from this period. The construction of this specific building was financed by two prominent men active in trade and politics: James Stevenson and William Cluxton.

James Stevenson was born in Ireland and immigrated to Canada, settling in Peterborough in 1843. He began his career as a merchant of tin, coal, stoves and sewing machines. His political career began in 1853 when he was first appointed mayor of Peterborough. Overall, he served ten one-year terms as mayor. One of his most notable achievements as mayor was securing the relocation of the Edison General Electric Company to Peterborough. Stevenson was also Conservative member of parliament for Peterborough West from 1887 to 1895. He ran against Liberal George A. Cox in his first election and won with only sixteen votes between them. During his time as MP, he campaigned for the construction of the Trent Valley Canal, known today as the Trent-Severn Waterway, and was president of the Trent Valley Canal Association in the late 1880s. He ran again in 1891 and won against Richard Hall with ease. He did not seek reelection in the election of 1896. He was also an active philanthropist, serving for fifty years on the Board of Education, in addition to being a founding member of the Peterborough Horticultural Society and founding director of the Little Lake Cemetery Company. Upon his death on October 25, 1910, he was widely mourned. Both City Council and the Board of Education passed motions of condolence at their subsequent meetings. He is buried in Little Lake Cemetery.

Stevenson's partner in this venture was William Cluxton. Born in Ireland in 1819 and orphaned at a young age, Cluxton came to Canada with an aunt and uncle. He worked in a variety of stores along George Street before opening his own general store in 1842. In 1872, he sold his business to two of his sons and a valued employee. After leaving the retail business he became manager of the Peterborough branch of the Commercial Bank of Canada. Outside of his business interests, he championed the advancement of Peterborough's industries. He was president of the Midland Railway Company, Marmora Mining Company and the Peterborough and Monaghan Gravel Road Company. He also served as president of the Little Lake Cemetery Company, Water Company and the Peterborough Lock Manufacturing Company, among others. A Conservative like Stevenson, he was member of parliament for Peterborough West from 1872-1874 and served on town council. He died on February 16, 1901. His funeral at St. John's Anglican Church was widely attended.

One of the building's notable long-standing tenants was a chemist, Herbert H. Edmison. His father was police magistrate for Peterborough and Peterborough County. According to *The Peterborough Examiner*, Edmison opened his drug store on November 26, 1898. In addition to his business, Edmison was involved in the local community, particularly through St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. He was a member of the church's young men's guild and later vice-president then president of the guild. He sold his business in April 1906 and moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he died on December 8, 1918.

Another long-standing tenant was Thomas C. Elliott. According to *The Peterborough Examiner* Elliott bought 390 George Street North for approximately \$12,000 in January 1905. At the time it was occupied by Edmison. Elliott allowed Edmison's lease to expire before completing an extensive renovation project. In 1908, Elliott began to amalgamate 390 and 392 into one edifice to house his department store. He sold fancy goods, and both ladies' and children's wear. In 1909, Elliott added Peterborough's first commercial hydraulic elevator to his store in time for the third floor to be turned into a toy emporium. On the first day of the elevator's operation, November 30, 1909, over 2,500 people rode it up to the toy emporium, according to *The Peterborough Examiner*. The addresses became separate establishments again in 1920 when Albion Sweets moved into 390 George Street North. Outside of his business affairs, Elliott contributed to the community. He sat on the public library board, was a member of the astrological society and a member of the Odd Fellows. He married Franny Napier and had two children, Vega and Jean. He died in York, Ontario in 1935.

Contextual Value

390-392 George Street North has contextual value as a continuation of the three-storey commercial row of buildings that characterizes Peterborough's downtown core. This property is visually, functionally and historically linked to its surroundings as an Italianate-style commercial building. It forms an important part of the 1860s reconstruction of George Street after the 1861 fire that destroyed a considerable section of the city's commercial core.

In 1861, a significant portion of George Street was destroyed by fire, leading to the reconstruction of large sections of the city's commercial downtown. This reconstruction corresponded with a period of rebuilding along many commercial main streets in Canada where frame structures were replaced with brick ones. Many of these new downtown streetscapes featured three- or four-storey buildings constructed to the lot line in the Italianate style with heavy, decorative cornices and ornate window surrounds. As in the case of George Street in Peterborough, these rows of commercial buildings developed as continuous blocks of distinctive structures which nevertheless maintained continuity through their consistent style, scale, massing, and window rhythm that created a uniform architectural vocabulary along a compact commercial frontage. 390-392 George Street North is an integral element of this nineteenth-century streetscape in Peterborough as part of unified commercial frontage defined by architecturally-unique structures constructed with a similar style, massing, and scale.

It forms an important part of the landscape of two and three storey brick commercial buildings on the east side of George Street, creating a seamless, uninterrupted line of historic buildings. Nearby buildings which contribute to this landscape include the Bank of Toronto Building at 396-400 George Street North and this property's immediate neighbour at 394 George Street North. Taken together, these buildings form part of a Victorian commercial landscape that defines the character of downtown Peterborough.

"The short statement of reasons for designation, including a description of the heritage attributes along with all other components of the Heritage Designation Brief constitute the "Reasons for the Designation" required under the Ontario Heritage Act. The Heritage Designation Brief is available for viewing in the City Clerk's office during regular business hours."

SHORT STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

390-392 George Street North yields cultural heritage value as a historic commercial building in Peterborough's downtown core. It displays a high degree of craftsmanship in its decorative elements such as the cornice and window hoods. It has direct association with two prominent businesspeople in Peterborough's history, James Stevenson and William Cluxton. Stevenson was a politician who served ten terms as mayor and two terms as member of parliament for Peterborough West. Cluxton was a prominent businessman who also served as member of parliament for Peterborough West. It yields further associative value through its longtime tenant's chemist Herbert Edmison and clothier Thomas C. Elliot. Elliot operated a department store out of both addresses from 1908-1920 and installed Peterborough's first hydraulic elevator in a commercial establishment. 390-392 George Street North is an important building within Peterborough's downtown core as a continuation of the historic commercial row. It is visually, historically and functionally linked to its surroundings as an Italianate-style commercial building with ground floor storefronts.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES TO BE DESIGNATED

The Reasons for Designation include the following heritage attributes and apply to all elevations and the roof, including all facades, entrances, windows, chimneys, and trim. Together with the construction materials of brick and their related building techniques.

Exterior Elements:

- Three story brick construction
- Brackets
- Rounded third story windows
- Corbels
- Cornice
- Flat roof
- Pilasters
- Window hoods
- Fenestration
- Ground floor storefronts
- Continuation of commercial row