

Alliston Heritage Tour

You can walk or drive!



Welcome!

New Tecumseth and the surrounding areas have a rich history of settlement and early occupation that can still be seen and appreciated in the many historic homes. This tour will guide you through some of Alliston's stunning Victorian-era houses. By providing information on some of the more prominent houses and the vibrant people who lived in them, we hope that Alliston and New Tecumseth's history will shine through from the past. So get out for a walk or drive and please enjoy this tour!

Heritage House General Information:

The Victorian period was the time between 1840-1900, and though it is usually talked about as being a set 'look', there were actually a few different styles of architecture encompassed by this one name.

The Victorian Style was considered the new type of modernism, which is why it had such mass appeal. After the 1860s, the style became a lot more elaborate thanks to new technologies. Balloon framing allowed for a break from the boxy houses that dominated before, and irregular floor plans could be achieved. The scroll saw was used to create detailed and unique patterns in woodwork, and millwork factories made these pieces available en masse. Equally important was the expansion of the railroad network, which allowed all the building materials to travel farther distances.

Types of Architecture:

Gothic Revival: Usually has details that were borrowed from the style of the middle ages, wood-frame buildings are a typical example of this style. Houses of this style will also likely have steep roofs and moulds over the windows. Other details include gable edges on the roof, high dormers, and lancet windows.

Victorian Italianate: This style was a way of rebelling against the formal, classical architecture of the period, and took its cues from Italian architecture. It is characterised by low roofs, wide eaves, and ornamental brackets. Other features can include angled bay windows, and facades made to resemble stones. A less elaborate take on this style is called Folk Victorian.

Second Empire: Sometimes called simply "Mansard Roof", this style is characterised by boxy roofs inspired by the style popular in Paris during the reign of Napoleon III. Features generally included on these houses are coloured tile patterns and iron cresting around the roofs, giving a "renaissance revival" look.

Queen Anne: Though apparently named after the wrong Queen, this is the style that most people picture when they think about a classic Victorian home. It is a very elaborate style, with towers, turrets, wrap-around porches, and other fanciful details. These houses usually have very ornamental wooden finishing. The Queen Anne style was one of the few not to incorporate historical architecture into the design, and so it is a style purely of that era.

Richardson Romanesque: Architect Henry Hobson Richardson is credited with popularising this style of romantic homes. Usually made from stone, they resemble small castles. This style is most often used for large public buildings as opposed to single-family homes.

Terminology:

Balloon Framing: A framing system for housing that uses lighter wood studs that extended the full height of the house, joists, and nails. This replaced the need for heavy timbre and peg construction.

Dentils: Moulding which goes around the house with rectangular holes.

Dormer: A window that sticks out of the roof, and has its own roof

Cornice: Decorative piece that runs along the roof where it meets the wall

Entablature: Upper part of the wall or storey

Gable: Decorative piece on the end of the top of the roof

Pediment: Piece that come out from the roof and covers the porch

Lancet Window: A high, narrow window capped by a lancet arch—a variety of narrow, pointed arch thought to look like the tip of a lance.

Lintel: Post that goes across the tope of a window or door

Transom: A small, decorative window or panel above a window or door

Oriel Window: A window that begins at the ground

Reveal Window: A window that just sticks out from the wall.

5116 Sir Frederick Banting Road—Banting Homestead “Ballyfin”

This house was originally the Meredith Homestead (maternal relatives of William Thompson Banting), built in 1858 in a Gothic Revival style with white clapboard siding. In 1891 William and his wife, Margaret Grant, moved from Thompsonville to the homestead, the same year that their son Frederick Banting was born. The family raised Shorthorn Cattle, pigs and chickens, as well as cultivating some



produce.

Several renovations took place while the Banting family lived there, including laying a new foundation, putting an addition for the hired help in the back, cladding the house in brick, and adding indoor water and sewage in 1903. Thompson Banting, the eldest son, took over the farm with his wife in 1915. During the 1920s, when Frederick Banting was working on his insulin research, he took a loan from his brother. When

Frederick was given his government stipend for research in 1925, he paid Thompson back. Thompson used this money to renovate the house extensively. He took down the west part of the house and renovated the east part with the original building materials—otherwise the farmhouse became too large and expensive to heat. A new porch was added, as was electricity. At the end of the renovations, the house became an 8-room house in an Edwardian styling. Though the famous Frederick Banting did not practice in Alliston, he frequently visited home to find peace and relaxation away from his insulin research and the resulting demands on his time. The outbuildings are also important to note. There is a barn, silo, pig barn, and implement shed. The original barn burnt down and was replaced in 1909 and a silo was added. In 1916, the barn and the pig barn burnt down again, to be replaced by a Beatty Bros barn of plank frame construction. The implement shed is a completely innovative Banting family design. The shape makes it easier to find and attach tractor implements for farming. It was built in 1918, using bricks from the local brickyard. The Cairn at the front of the property is a one tonne granite sphere made to represent the impact of insulin around the world. Finally, the homestead is also the site of archaeological excavations. The Banting family used to find old arrowhead, axe heads and a stone necklace while working the farm. In 1973-75, the drumlin hill on the property was excavated by Peter Storck, who found that the site was a Paleo-Indian campground.

The Castle

This Victorian home, though no longer standing, was the house of George Fletcher, son of the founding family, before it was purchased by T.M Brown. The original section of the house was built by George, with Brown adding the 'Tower' and the west wing. This beautiful Queen-Anne house was torn down in 1968 to make room for an expansion of Banting Memorial High School. A scale model of this house can be seen at the Museum on the Boyne, which will show that though the house is gone, it is relevant to the tour as it was such a beautiful example of Victorian architecture.



97 Victoria

This house was originally owned by Martha J. McKnight, and was built by her husband, Richard, a contractor. This house can be compared to the Eli Downey House at 66 Wellington St. E., also built by Richard McKnight.

100 Victoria “Fisher House”

This house was built in the Italianate style, with some hints of Victorian Eclectic. John Fisher was the Reeve of Tosorontio and the Magistrate between 1868-1872. He bought the land for the house from John Fletcher in 1877, and moved his family to Alliston where he continued to be a notable public figure. He was an early advocate for a high school in Alliston, was president of the Alliston Market House Company in 1881, a member of village council, the first president of the Alliston Union Cemetery 1885-1906, and president of the Woollen Mill after the Alliston fire in 1891. Fisher was also the Mayor in 1894, when he was key in binging the CPR to Alliston in 1906.

Fisher's son Walter George also lived in the house. He was a schoolteacher for three years, before switching to law. He practiced with the firm of Fisher and Bell, 1887-1913.

133 Victoria St E. “Mary Drury House”

Brick, 2 storey gothic house, 2 gables

In an 1880 assessment of the property, the owner is listed as Mary Jane Drury, widow, 39. She built the house, which was mortgaged by Rufus Embree and George Fletcher. In the 1890s the house was owned by George Dinwoody, probably related to the Dinwoody who cleared land in Essa. Currently, the house is divided into apartments.

134 Victoria St. E “James Greenlees home”

James Diamond Greenlees, a sawyer in the lumber business, built this house in 1883 in a Victorian Gothic and Italiante style. Greenlees owned a planing mill in Alliston with James Jerrett, where they manufactured wood products for the growing building trade. James married Elizabeth Connell in West Essa in 1880, and they became highly regarded members of the community. In 1921 the house was sold to Christopher and Ellen Jane Thompson of Essa. Their only son, Wilmot, owned the Alliston Monument Works. Recently, the 1920s porch addition was remodelled, the house was painted historic colours, and landscaping has brought this house back to original status in what was once Alliston’s premier neighbourhood.



27 Dufferin St

This house, with its centre gable, is an example of a brick 1 ½ storey Ontario Gothic style.

Thomas Gordon was the original owner in 1883, and then sold to Mark Loblaw in 1897.

66 Wellington St. E “Eli Downey House”



A brick 2 ½ storey Queen Anne style house built in 1908 by Richard McKnight, it was bought in 1910 by Eli Downey and his wife. Downey was a retired farmer who delivered mail along R.R. #4 for 30 years. The drive shed where he kept his horse and wagon is still standing. The Downey family added the veranda porch sometime after 1910, and the initials of one of Downey’s daughters are still visible in the brick near the porch.

57 Wellington “Farmers’s Inn Lot/Hand House”

This site was originally the Farmer’s Inn, which was operated between 1861 and 1873 by Thomas Lounds and then Patrick Foy. In 1873, the property was sold to Mr. Ferguson, owner of the Alliston Planing Mill, who built the house that same year. The house was sold at auction in 1877 to Isabella Hand, the wife of William Hand, the first veterinarian in Alliston



as well as the owner of the Dominion Hotel. Dr. Hand opened his practice in 1878, and it was carried on by his son-in-law George McCluskey when Hand died. A small veterinary office and barn also stood on the lot. It was owned by various members of the Hand family until 1971, although in the 1950s it had fallen into disrepair. In 1981 the property was sold and restored, avoiding the fate of being torn down.

70 Church St. S. “Jenkins’ House”

This house is a 1 ½ storey Picturesque Revival. The earliest date of sale is 1876 from George Fletcher to James Morrison. The building date of this house is unknown, although it may have had an earlier structure underneath it.

Steve Jenkins bought the house in 1943; he was the proprietor of a garage on Victoria St. and was known as a very spiritual man.

58 Church St.

Built on two lots, this is a very early house as some of the windows are original, dating from the 1850s-1860s. The interior staircase is also worth mentioning as being in very good condition compared to the rest of the house. In 1874, the house was sold to James McDonald by George Fletcher.

16 Nelson St, W

The front half of this brick 2-storey house may be of more recent construction than the back section with the centre gable. It would have faced Centre St, then known as Alma St. Due to this information, we can surmise that the house was built before 1874, when the name of Alma street was changed. This house is like 40 Centre St, which is northeast of this house on the same block.



Lorne McMulkin was a mayor of Alliston and operated a dry goods store on Victoria St between 1922 and 1966.

29 Nelson St, W

This is a 1 ½ storey siding house in the Ontario Gothic Revival style. In the census of 1873, Elizabeth and Ann Graham of Orillia are listed as the owners. These ladies are also given the distinction of being spinsters.

90 Nelson St. W “Herbert Murphy House”



John Agnew bought the lot in 1878, and built the house around 1880. Herbert and Margaret Murphy bought the house in 1919.

It is a board and batten, 1 ½ storey Gothic style house, with Victorian ornamentation. The current exterior is not original.

97 Nelson St. W

This 2 storey brick house, was built in 1881 by Daniel Muirhead, a carpenter. He sold the house with a small wooden carriage house to Robert Scott in 1882. Currently, the house is divided into three apartments.

100 Nelson St. W “Ellis House”

A Georgian style, 2-storey brick house with many of its original features. Though the front door has been altered, evidence of the original veranda remains, as do two lower windows. This house also boasts a very tall brick chimney and a hipped roof.

Original owners were Peter Clark MacNee/John & Elizabeth Gallagher. Most likely built 1880-1881. William S. Ellis bought the house from Elizabeth Gallagher and Thomas Murphy in March 1891.

126 Nelson St. W

This 2 storey brick house was built in the Edwardian Style, and originally owned by Malcolm McGregor, who also owned a sawmill in Tosorontio Township. There is a plaque built into the building that testifies to the original ownership and the year the house was erected.

22 Ontario St. “W.J. Wood House”



This sprawling example of a Queen Anne style house was built in 1905 by W.J. Wood, owner of a local general store in the 1890s and a cousin through marriage of T.P. Loblaw. The house was sold to Dr. Mackenzie, who used it as his medical offices. Later, the house was bought by William Welch because his wife Annie very much wanted to live in this landmark home. This popular couple hosted many parties where Will always played the fiddle.

66 Wellington W “R.S. Cheffey House”

This 2 storey painted brick house was built for Dr. Samuel Cheffey, and belonged to the family between 1873-1906. It retains the original wood features around the windows, as well as the keystones, though they have since been painted. This was the first brick house built in Alliston, and was where W.S. Knight, a builder, received his first instruction in brick laying.



122 Victoria

Before the building of Bern’s Flowers, there was a very simple little house that stood here. This was the Grant house, where Margaret Grant was born. She has the double distinction of being the first white child born in Alliston, and the mother for Sir Frederick Banting.

157 Victoria “Frederick Elliot House”

In 1911, Frederick Elliot came to Alliston with his wife Bertha, having purchased the Herald. In this capacity, he covered WWI, the roaring 20s, and into the Great Depression. He became very involved and well known in town, and served as town councillor, Reeve, director of Stevenson Memorial Hospital, High School Board member, president of Agricultural Society, Master Mason, chairman of Lions Club, chairman of the local Boy Scouts committee, and was active in church. He is well known for having kept the paper going through the great depression in the 30s, putting in a lot of lonely hours to make sure the people of Alliston still got their news.

162 Victoria St. W “Isaac McDonald House”



This 1 ½ storey home was built circa 1870 by Isaac McDonald. Isaac and his brother James were millwrights working in the Alliston area. James was rebuilding a sawmill in Tosorontio and Isaac was most likely working for the Fletcher family in their gristmill. After completing his work, Isaac decided to stay in the growing village. He purchased a quarter-acre lot on Victoria Street, working as a carpenter and builder.

Though presently a brick and stucco building, the 1891 census lists a wood-frame building. Clad in brick sometime before 1927, the uneven appearance suggests the use of reclaimed brick. In 1884, Isaac and his family left for Oxford Township, and the house was sold to William J. Stinson, a carpenter who also worked as a clerk for the Dominion woollen mill. The house was in possession of various families, and was restored in 1994 by Mike MacEachern and Cassandra de Grace.

216 Victoria “Major Hartley Graham House”

This house was built in 1879 for Dr. Bell, and in 1913 became the home of Major and Mrs Hartley Graham. Major Graham was involved in the supporting the location for Base Borden. He was also remembered for letting the local children borrow his boat to go out on the water at Alderson Beach, a swimming area at the mill pond behind his house.

123 King St. “Norton House”

This was the house of William J. Norton, the owner of the brickyard in Alliston, who built the house with his own product in 1892. The brickyard opened in 1877, just north of the house, and grew rapidly. Due to the prosperity of the business, Norton was able to purchase the latest labour-saving machinery which was essential in meeting the demand for 1 million bricks after the Alliston fire in 1891. Originally the lot contained the house, barn, and stables, but the latter two are now listed as 255 Fletcher Cres.

73 Fletcher Cres.

An Edwardian Style brick house, it belonged to Mayor W.J. Cunningham. Cunningham bought the electric light plant from the Fletchers in 1890, and when it was closed, he used reclaimed bricks from the plant to build this house in 1946, when he was 76 years old. Through the marriage of his daughter, he was related to the Thompson family.



62 Fletcher Cres.



This is an example of the Classical Revival style 2 ½ storey brick house. To be noted is the strange roofline, which was a money saving measure. This roof is similar to 73 Fletcher and the McCagues’ House, because they were all built by W.J. Cunningham. Additionally, this house was built in 1912 with reclaimed brick from the electric light plant.

44 Fletcher Cres. “William Fletcher House”

Built in 1849 by William Fletcher, this is the oldest house in Alliston. William Fletcher was born April 1, 1791 in England, and along with his wife is regarded as the founder of Alliston. They settled the area in 1847 and built a dam along the Boyne River, which they used in 1853 when they built their sawmill.

Fletcher and his wife, Margaret Jane McGirr from Ireland had three sons, John, Joseph and George. In 1859, George as the postmaster likely operated from his parent’s home, before moving the post office to various locations along Victoria Street.



18 Fletcher Cres. “John Fletcher House”

Original owner was John Fletcher, son of William and Margaret Fletcher, who was the sawmill proprietor. His brother George, and George’s son William also lived there for a time.

Built about 1861, it is a 2-storey clapboard Georgian style house. On the inside much of the original hardware and plaster remain, the house originally had 3 chimneys.

John Fletcher was quite the land owner, and had: 620 acres, 11 village lots, 4 dwelling houses, 2 factories, stores, 2 barns.