

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

555 Riverbank Drive (Gehl House)

Description of Historic Place

The property known municipally as 555 Riverbank Drive is located along the Grand River, on the east side of Riverbank Drive. The property contains substantial lawns, numerous trees, a large farmhouse and several outbuildings including a stone outbuilding known as the “cook house” along with a complex of large barns. The Gehl House and cook house date to the mid-19th century.

Summary of Cultural Heritage Value

The property at 555 Riverbank Drive exhibits physical/design value, historical/associative value, and contextual value.

The dwelling at 555 Riverbank Drive is considered a representative example of Mennonite Georgian architecture with its solid rectangular form, unadorned exterior, and symmetrical proportions typical of this architectural style popular with Pennsylvania German Mennonites. The unembellished nature of this architectural style is illustrative of the cultural values of this community, such as simplicity, modesty, and plainness. The use of stone in both the Gehl House and the cook house are also excellent examples of the tradition of local fieldstone masonry; making use of immediately available building materials. The wooden barn buildings are also representative of working farms from the 19th century.

The Gehl House is estimated to have been built ca. 1850 by Richard Gehl (1825-1909). Gehl was a Prussian-born farmer who was considered to be a part of a group of primarily Catholic German settlers known as the “New Germany Pioneers”. Gehl was married to Rebecca Toman (1829-1904) and together they had six children. The property is also associated several other pioneering families in Waterloo Region such as the Brickers and Ebys. The property is directly associated with Samuel Bricker (1776-1868), one of the earliest settlers in the area and a founding member of the German Company. The property is strongly associated with Pennsylvania German culture and farming traditions among early Mennonites.

Contextually, the property is located along the Grand River in a rural setting on Riverbank Drive. The property contributes to this character through a landscape of mature trees, expansive lawns, and vegetation framing the lot. The property also contains an abundance of mature walnut trees, including an allée that frames the gravel entrance path with large trees.

Description of Heritage Attributes

The character-defining heritage attributes of the property include the following:

- The Gehl House, consisting of the following features:
 - Rectangular plan.
 - All four elevations composed of fieldstone masonry.
 - All window openings, window sills, and decorative brick flat and jack arches above windows and doors.
 - The three-bay façade and recessed wood entrance.

Appendix A

- The roofline and pitch.
 - The rear, one-storey stone extension.
- The cook house building, consisting of the following features:
 - Rectangular plan.
 - All four elevations composed of fieldstone masonry.
 - All window openings, window sills, and decorative brick flat and jack arches above windows and doors.
 - The three-bay façade.
 - The roofline, pitch, and chimney.
- The complex of 19th century barn buildings located in the southeast corner of the property.
- The allée of deciduous trees framing the gravel path and entrance to the property.
- Mature walnut trees contributing to the rural, park-like setting on the property.

The property's heritage designation does not extend to any interior features.