

James Cunningham House

7949 County Road 2, Cobourg Ontario, K9A 4J7

<https://www.royallepage.ca/en/property/ontario/cobourg/7949-county-rd-2/15555403/mlsx5323238/>

Date: 1866 to 1871

Architectural Importance

The Cunningham house is a good example of an early Italianate house retaining almost all its original exterior and interior features. The two-storey three-bay house with hipped roof and almost cube shaped is typical of symmetrical Italianate house form. Other features typical of the Italianate style are a prominent entranceway with sidelights and transom and the semi-circular headed window. The windows are longer in proportion, with six-over-six sash typical of the late 1860s/early 1870s. Interesting the ground floor windows seem larger than the ones on the upper floor. A brick band course visual separates the first and second floors, no doubt a stringer course from which a verandah roof could be secured. Some of the original verandah appears to survive on back of the house.

Much of the interior lay-out, details, trim and mantels survive. Rather uncommon is the centre hall that extends from the front to the back of the house. The backdoor or south door has a simple transom over the doorway.

The “tail” is interestingly and unusually placed asymmetrically on the back of the house. Its form, gently sloping gable roof and windows on the south façade suggest an earlier date. It is possible that the earlier one-and-a-half storey frame house that existed on the property was re-purposed as a service wing and sheathed in brick. The gables in the tail have round-headed window similar to the one on the façade.

History

The house was built on land that was part of Charles Shaw's original land grant. In 1814 he sold the property to Benjamin Nichols who came up from Dutchess County New York about 1810. After Benjamin's death the property passed to his son Nathan. The southern part of the property was bought by Sidney Smith. On that site he built Hamilton House.

By 1861, the northern portion of the property had been split in two. Nathan Nichols occupied the western portion while his son Charles owned the eastern piece. Nathan Nichols died that same year. Charles Nichols married Margaret Grandy. They and their descendants played a prominent role in Hamilton Township and Cobourg.

According the 1861 census, Nathan and his family were living in a one and a half storey frame house. A few years later the family sold the house and property to William Kerr.

William Kerr, a Cobourg lawyer and later Dominion Senator had married Myra, daughter of John Field of Cobourg. Kerr was born in Prince Edward County. His mother Olive Shelley first married Elias Wallbridge, member of a prominent "county" family. Her second husband was Frances Kerr, William's father.

After Kerr purchased the Nichols' property, he made some type of arrangement with his half-sister and her husband, James and Elizabeth Wallbridge Cunningham to lease or buy the farm. It was at this time the current house was built. The Cunningham's lived in the house until about 1886 when they left for North Dakota and eventually Alberta and Saskatchewan. That same year William Kerr sold the property.

It continued as a working farm for approximately another 60 years.