

## **STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE**

### **DESCRIPTION**

Municipal Address: 30 Stegman's Mill

Legal Description: Plan 3755, Pt Lot 8 (Con 8, Lot 26)

Roll: 192800350205000000

Brief description: 1-storey flat roof structure built in Canadian variant of modernist style.

### **OVERVIEW**

The cultural heritage value of the property known as 30 Stegman's Mill Road meets the criteria set out by the *Ontario Heritage Act* under Province of Ontario Regulation 9/06 for the categories of design/physical, historical/associative and contextual value.

Name: The Berton House

Date Built: 1950 - 1954

Address: 30 Stegman's Mill Road

Location: between Windrush Road and Kleinburg Summit Way

Condition: The house is in good to fair physical condition

### **DESIGN OR PHYSICAL VALUE**

A Canadian variant of the modernist style, which emerged in the mid to late 1940's in Ontario, 30 Stegman's Mill Road reflects architectural design principles rooted in the international style, adapted to reconcile them with contemporary technology and materials of the time also in response to the Canadian climate and landscape.

The Pierre Berton house exhibits features characteristic of the regional variant of the Canadian modernist style as well. The original core being built in 1950 is an early example of the style in Vaughan. The Berton family has let staff know that the house design was inspired on a floor plan published in a 1948 *Sunset Magazine* issue. The north office was designed by John C. Parkin of Parkin Associates and the kitchen and expanded dining room were designed by Joanna Odoski.

Originally built in 1950, 30 Stegman's Mill Road is a 1-storey, flat roofed structure, built as a Canadian vernacular variant of the modernist Usonian style with a detached garage which is joined to the house only by a covered walkway. Its exterior aesthetic was designed to fit into the natural landscape of the site through elevations that are long and low, with large expanses of glass for windows that reach the ceiling and soffit, topped by a flat roof with oversized overhangs. In plan, it was designed with an essentially orthogonal core, to which later sections were added. The main level is nestled into the landscape and the main level of the additions extend above grade level towards the north of the site providing views through and over vegetation to a secluded part of the Humber valley beyond. This northernmost view is enjoyed from the late Pierre Berton's home office.

Throughout the house, the floor plates act as platforms of livable spaces from which the inhabitant can enjoy a myriad of wonderful views offered by the surrounding natural landscape. The windows are strategically placed primarily to the west and north, while the southern

portion opens up to a private patio area. Most of the glazed areas correspond to the rooms that would benefit the most from the views and natural light, such as the living room, kitchen and dining room, or less public areas such as the bedrooms and the office. The east elevation was designed with smaller windows, starting at a higher sill, in order to guard the privacy of the spaces behind, while still providing the opportunity for light and ventilation, such as in the washroom windows.

Part of the original portion of the house has been kept essentially as it was originally. And contains the living room, entrance hall (although the location of the door changed) and main fireplace. In this house, the hearth's design and placement sets the tone for the style of the entire home. The location and style of the fireplace, its relationship to its adjacent stone wall that continues to the exterior, and the dimensional relationship to the glass wall or large window across from it on the west wall, is where the design originates for this home.

The structure is topped by a white ceiling that surpasses the window glass that reaches it and continues on the same plane to the exterior to form the soffit. This continuity of architectural elements and their materials, from exterior to interior, results in a characteristic fluidity between the two types of spaces of the Canadian variant of the modernist style. The same architectural aesthetic continues through the bedroom and kitchen wings, although not to as high a statement as in the living room and core area.

### **Material Palette**

The visible exterior material palette comprises of mainly flagstone, painted wood board and batten, glass, varnished wood for the window frames, and painted wood and galvanized metal that has been painted. The interior palette is mainly comprised of varnished wood, flagstone, ceiling tile (white), gypsum wall and carpet. The use of built-ins and wood paneling is also characteristic.

### Exterior

- Chimney material and location
- Exterior stone wall
- Size of window openings and visible materials of window frames
- Flat roof design and overhanging soffits, horizontal lines expressed by metal clad fascia
- Soffit: unadorned except for understated lighting fixtures, flat, at same elevation as interior ceiling
- Wood Exterior board and batten cladding
- Covered connection over walkway leading to front door on one end and to flat roofed garage structure door.
- The location and siting of the house to fit into the natural setting and window openings located to take advantage of the vistas around the property.

### Interior

The living room and fireplace has been maintained as it was designed when the house was originally built in 1949. The living room contains three features that give away its modernist influences, with a west coast flavour: the stone wall containing the fireplace, the stone wall that extends to the outside beyond the west exterior the window to the west. The fireplace sits

almost centrally located in the room as a random laid flagstone dividing wall between the arrival hall and the living room.

Entrance hall and connection, at east side of fireplace stone wall, to corridor of north additions are also significant interior features.

Initially, the property was comprised of Lots 8 and 9 of the Registered Plan 3755. However, in 2012, Lot 9 was severed and sold, although no application for a residence has come forward.

## **HISTORICAL/ASSOCIATIVE VALUE**

### The Bertons

The property has significant associative value because of its long term association with Pierre and Janet Berton who first purchased the property in 1949. In addition to purchasing the property, they also were significantly involved in its design and construction through the years. They lived on the property for over 55 years and it evolved through the years according to their tastes and needs.

Pierre Berton is widely known as a significant Canadian writer who published over 50 books. His non-fiction books on Canadian history enjoy a significant place in Canada's popular imagination, and his books have inspired many to learn more about Canadian history. He was also popular personality on CBC television throughout the 60's, 70's and well into the early 2000's when he appeared with Rick Mercer. When Mr. Berton passed in 2004, his ashes were scattered on the property.

Janet Berton was known for her volunteerism in Kleinburg and for Vaughan. For many years, she was on the Heritage Vaughan Committee, the Kleinburg and Area Ratepayers Association (KARA), and the Kleinburg Bindertwine Festival. Her efforts in researching so much of Vaughan's history led to a significant donation to the City's Archives and provide significant documentation of Vaughan's history. Outside of heritage matters, she was assisted in founding HELP, an information and referral service in Vaughan, as well as volunteering in the local school system.

### Windrush Co-operative

The Windrush Co-Operative was formally created in 1954 by ten professionals from the City of Toronto who desired a rural retreat that was still within driving distance from their place of work (it is registered as Plan of Subdivision 3755 with the City of Vaughan) and in the post WWII era, the commute from Toronto to Kleinburg along Hwy 27 was a reasonable one (Kleinburg-Nashville guidelines, p.40). The Nashville-Kleinburg Guidelines state that, "Windrush was something of an 'artist's colony', and the members were among those few who took their modern architecture straight up. Many of the original houses are quite faithful to the example of Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Usonian' houses..." (p.40). A subdivision agreement for the co-op reveals the occupations of its founding members as an engineer, executive sales manager, writer, film producer, dentist, and editor (attachment) (files from the Co-op list the original houses as owned by Sinclair, Hogg, Carnall, Weatherall, Leslie, Mackay, Redford, Berton, Hayne, and Collins). Jean-Louis Cohen explains how the Usonian style that Frank Lloyd Wright developed was in response to create a more affordable dwelling for Americans over his "luxurious Prairie Houses". These Usonian houses were designed for professionals of modest means (2012, p.228).

The concept and design of the Windrush Co-operative was largely the brainchild of William “Bill” McCrow. McCrow was a set designer for CBC and went on to become the Art Director for several projects well into the 1980’s, and he is thought to have designed several houses in Toronto, Brant, and other southern Ontario properties. He was the creator who convinced all the parties to invest in the idea and to fund the project. The result were 9 homes drawing on the traditions of modernist and Usonian styles, using natural and local materials and designed for the needs and preferences of each family.

As the guidelines express, the design of each house was integral to the housing co-operative and the residents of the co-op took much pride in their co-op. Each property in the co-op was subject to Schedule “A” which was an attachment that ran with each deed. The conditions explicitly state that only one dwelling shall be on each property, all new building and additions should conform to the existing architecture, the dwellings shall only be used for residential purposes (with the exception of studio uses relating to their profession), the parcels cannot be subdivided as the co-op shall be seen as a whole, no boundaries or fences can be erected, and any changes to this schedule must be approved by a unanimous vote by the members of the co-op (attachment). The co-operative was likely dissolved sometime after 2006, as the Berton family was able to divide the property in 2012 and the parcel previously known as “Lot 9” was sold.

The CP caboose car on the property is an example of one of the secondary studios – a gift from Pierre Berton’s children on one of his birthday, it is installed on railway tracks on the property. It is permitted as a studio and because it is not considered a permanent structure.

## **CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS**

30 Stegman’s Mill Road also contains contextual heritage value, as it is an early post WWII example of housing in Vaughan and was specifically designed to not be a typical pre-fabricated residence, but one that used local materials and the landscape. The property is both part of the post WWII boom experienced in Kleinburg and other Vaughan settlement areas that would rapidly expand in the 1950’s, but is also a response and push back to the pre-fabricated and suburban subdivision design.

The gardens and landscaping on the property also have contextual value, as they were planted by the Bertons to create their own Canadian forest around their house and provide privacy from the road. Paths in and around the property are designed to lead you to different vistas and to the other properties, as Windrush properties were designed to flow into each other properties, to create the feel of a natural, hidden retreat.

## **SUMMARY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE**

### **Architectural**

#### Exterior 1949 portion

- Chimney material and location
- Exterior stone wall
- Size of window openings and visible materials of window frames

- ❑ Flat roof design and overhanging soffits, horizontal lines expressed by metal clad fascia
- ❑ Soffit: unadorned except for understated lighting fixtures, flat, at same elevation as interior ceiling
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- ❑ Covered connection over walkway leading to front door on one end and to flat roofed garage structure door
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### Interior

The living room and fireplace has been maintained as it was designed when the house was originally built in 1949 with three specific features:

- ❑ the stone wall containing the fireplace
- ❑ the stone wall that extends to the outside beyond the west exterior the window to the west. The fireplace sits almost centrally located in the room as a random laid flagstone dividing wall between the arrival hall and the living room
- ❑ Entrance hall and connection to corridor of north additions at east side of fireplace stone wall

### **Associative Value**

- ❑ home of Pierre and Janet Berton. Pierre Berton was a prominent Canadian writer and television personality with the CBC. Janet Berton was locally known for her extensive volunteer work in Vaughan and her contributions to the community.
- ❑ one of the most prominent properties of the Windrush Co-operative: while Pierre and Janet Berton are the best known of the residents, the community also included Lister and Margaret Sinclair, film producer James William MacKay, Gordon Redford and his wife, Irene Kent-Redford who founded the Make Up Department at the CBC in 1952, and was a founding member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local Union in Toronto.
- ❑ associated with William “Bill” McCrow, a set designer for CBC and went on to become the Art Director for several projects well into the 1980’s, and he is thought to have designed several houses in Toronto, Brant, and other southern Ontario properties. He was the initial creator of the project, who convinced all the parties to invest in the idea.

### **Contextual Value**

- ❑ this property, along with the other surviving Windrush properties, represents a significant phase of Kleinburg in the 1950’s with the emergence of the modern, close knit village community.
- ❑ The landscape has been purposely designed to create a natural forest feeling.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES**

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Cultural Heritage staff site visits in 2012 – 2023

Berton family

Pierre Berton: A Biography, Mckillop, Brian, Published 2010

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Post and Beam Construction, a Presentation by the Canadian Wood Council, 2010.

[http://www.architecture.uwaterloo.ca/faculty\\_projects/terri/arch\\_crs/f06/pdf/Post\\_Beam\\_Construct.pdf](http://www.architecture.uwaterloo.ca/faculty_projects/terri/arch_crs/f06/pdf/Post_Beam_Construct.pdf)

The Invasion of Pierre Berton (1981) - the fifth estate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-Nb8J5d5M>