

Heritage Officer's Statement of Significance for the Figg Residence

Description of Historic Place

The Figg Residence is a one and one-half storey dwelling located in the Bonnie Doon neighbourhood in Edmonton. The building was constructed in circa 1914, and is a surviving example of a small farmhouse built in the local vernacular style, with some Craftsman influences. It is located on the south side of 84 Avenue, west of 91 Street.

It is believed the house was originally located on a farmstead near 85 Street and 80 Avenue and was relocated to the current site in 1927.

Heritage Value

The Figg Residence is valued for its association with the early development of the Bonnie Doon area. Due to its early construction in circa 1914 as a small farmhouse, the Figg Residence is somewhat smaller in scale than the modest homes that were built in the area in the post-Second World War era.

The first subdivisions on the tablelands east of Mill Creek date to 1906. While not the first subdivision in the immediate area, in 1911, former Alberta premier Alexander Rutherford subdivided land straddling Whyte Avenue east of the creek and named the subdivision Bonnie Doon, in memory of his ancestral homeland, Scotland. Like many parts of Edmonton at the time, development occurred slowly, and the area remained more rural in nature well into the 1930s. In the post-Second World War era, residential development in Bonnie Doon boomed, and most vacant lots were soon occupied by new homes. Prominent at that time, and remaining so to this day, was the former Saint-Jean School, now known as the Campus Saint-Jean, which is directly to the north of the Figg Residence across 84 Avenue. Originally founded in Pincher Creek in 1908 by an Oblate priest as a juniorate, a place to instruct junior members preparing for life in the Oblate order, the school relocated to a new building in its current location in Edmonton in 1911.

The Figg Residence is also valued for its vernacular architecture, including its Craftsman design influences. Built in circa 1914 as a farmhouse, the building is small in scale and simple in design, but does exhibit influences of the Craftsman design.

Built in a rectangular plan, the house features a front-facing centre gable roof, with a medium pitch, and shallow projecting eaves and verges. A prominent brick chimney is located on the east side of the roofline. The front (north) elevation is distinguished by a prominent veranda with a hipped roof, supported by three plain pillars. The east portion of the veranda is closed, and features a large multi-paned window. On the lower level of the front elevation, an original window opening on the west side has been converted to a patio door opening. There is a single window on the upper floor in a 1-over-1 configuration. The fenestration pattern on the rest of the house is largely original, with some windows having been replaced.

On the front and rear elevations, the upper portion of the centre gable is clad in wood shingle siding, while the balance of the building is clad in wood clapboard siding. The siding includes decorative cornerboards, and most windows have simple wood lintels and sills. While also likely clad in wood siding, the exterior of the veranda rails have been clad in stucco, possibly early after the house was relocated to the site. The veranda rails are closed. A small sunroom addition at the rear of the house appears to have been added sometime between 1943 and 1952 (possibly by 1946), based on aerial images. The addition features the same type of cladding as the house, and maintains its original fenestration pattern. Foundation parging extends quite high on all elevations of the building.

The original owners of the house were Ernest and Ethel Figg. Both originally born in England, they were married in 1913 and moved into the house while it was still in its original location (near 80 Avenue and 85 Street) in circa 1914. Ernest had served with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Forty-Ninth Battalion, in the First World War. In 1927, the Figgs relocated the house to its current location at 9117 - 84 Avenue in Bonnie Doon. At that time, there was little residential development in the area, and only some streets had even been constructed. The Saint-Jean School was located to the immediate north across 84 Avenue. Ernest was a Manager with a local post office, and a Master in the Masonic Lodge. The Figgs had four children: Violet Agnes (b. 1914), Dorothy Grace (b. 1917), Arthur Harry (b. 1920) and Ernest Dyer (b. 1924). Both Arthur and Ernest went on to serve in the Second World War – Arthur as a Sgt.-Observer, and Ernest Dyer as a Flying Officer, both with the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Both would be tragically killed in service – Arthur in 1941 and Ernest in 1944 – increasing the significance of the Figg Residence through its association with the sacrifices made by Edmonton families for the war effort.

Dorothy married Robert John Caston, also an officer in the RCAF, in 1943. Ernest and Ethel moved from Edmonton to Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1946, and Robert and Dorothy moved into the home. They had two children, Arthur Thomas (b. 1944) and Carol Maureen (b. 1948), and continued to live in the home until 1952. From 1953 to 1954, Harold and Helen Bradly resided in the home; Harold was employed with WR Zeidler Ltd. Ash Millwork Doors. From 1955 to 1961, Ernie and Marg Zurch lived in the home. Ernie and his brother, Henry, operated Zurch's Shoe Repair from 1942 to 1987. Ernie was also a former amateur and professional boxer, and was directly involved with establishing the South Side Legion Boxing Club. In 1984, Ernie was added to the Edmonton Boxing and Wrestling Commission's Honour Roll for his contributions.

Character-defining Elements

Key character-defining elements of the Figg Residence include:

- Form, scale and massing as expressed by its one and one-half storey height
- Location on 84 Avenue, to the immediate south of the Campus Saint-Jean site in the Bonnie Doon neighbourhood
- One and one-half storey height, built on a rectangular plan with a short facade
- Front-facing, medium-pitch gable roof
- Shallow projecting eaves and verges
- Original fenestration pattern, with some original windows
- Wood shingle siding in gable peak on front elevation
- Horizontal wood clapboard siding on the lower portion of the building, on the north, east and west elevations
- Plain wood lintels and sills on all window openings
- Open veranda on north elevation with hipped roof and three plain pillars (east portion of veranda is closed)
- Closed railings on veranda, clad in stucco
- High parging on foundation on the north, east and west elevations
- Brick chimney on west side of roof