

NELLES-FITCH HOUSE

125 MAIN STREET WEST

CIRCA 1791

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Nelles-Fitch house was built by Robert Nelles in 1791 as a temporary residence in which he and his wife Elizabeth could reside while their manor home was being constructed. The home was actually built in two components. The southern wing of the home is believed to be the original cabin built in 1785 before Robert and Elizabeth were first married (1) while the larger addition was added six years following. Two additional extensions to the south and east were added in subsequent years.

Robert Nelles holds a place of distinction in the annals of Grimsby history. The son of a United Empire Loyalist, Robert himself was forced to repatriate after the American Revolution because of his allegiance to the crown. Following his distinguished service in the war, Robert, then a lieutenant, moved with his father and brothers to the Forty. He was subsequently deeded a homestead along the Grand River but moved back to the Forty to marry Elizabeth Moore (2).

By 1794, Robert Nelles was commissioned an officer in the Fourth Lincoln Regiment. During the war of 1812, he rose to the position of Regiment Commander letting his troops use the Nelles-Fitch house as their barracks (by this time he had moved into the Nelles Manor). The basement of the house was used as a stockade for prisoners of war (3). It is said that the basement cell was in use until the 1950's.

In addition to his military accomplishments, Robert Nelles was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1796 and Town Warden in 1797. By 1798, his successes were recognized throughout Upper Canada and he was appointed to the legislative assembly (4).

After the war of 1812, the Nelles-Fitch house became the principle residence of Robert's son Henry. Henry was appointed Town Post Master in 1828, a position which he held until his death in 1841 (5). By 1852, the home was sold by Henry's son William to Doctor William Fitch. The house was then willed to the Doctor's son William 'Doc' Fitch. 'Doc' Fitch, a renowned cricketeer, is described as 'one of the Town's more notable characters'. The house remained in the Fitch family until 1938.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

General Description

The Nelles-Fitch house, located at 125 Main Street West, is an excellent example of the early Georgian style that later became more prominent throughout Upper Canada. The one and a half storey home is of wood construction with a low, course ashler and rubble foundation typical of the era. Like most Georgian houses, the Nelles-Fitch house is generally symmetric about the front door which served as the focal point of the entire house.

The house possesses several features which are unusual in the area. Most notable among them is the protruding fire place to the rear of the home and the hooded chimneys which are capped with unusual brick ovals. In addition, the windows and portico of the front facade still contain the original wood trim. The south wing, commonly held to be the original cabin of the homestead, has been described by architect Peter John Stokes to be of early french construction.

North Elevation

The front facade of the Nelles-Fitch house preserves the form of the house as it was first built. The front entrance is more elaborate than most others of the era. It features a common portico with a semi-elliptical, three centered arch supported by fluted pilasters and pillars. Upon inspection, there is evidence of the original wood railings and benches which ran between the pillar and pilasters. The pillars are chamfered and rest on squared bases with pointed and nothed capitals. Two double hung, six over six side lights are located on either side of the front door reaching above the door frame to a simple fan light which had been removed but is to be replaced.



The front facade contains four twelve over twelve, double hung, sashed windows which are placed symmetrically about the front entrance. The windows are still framed with the original simple trim. In addition, there are three dormered windows on the second floor which appear to be a later addition to the house. The two outside dormers are shed dormers while the middle is a gabled dormer. The frieze boards have rolled lowered edges with decorative mouldings supporting the eaves.

East & West Elevations



The eastern elevation of the Nelles-Fitch home is an integrated addition to the original home. There are bracketed hoods over the side entrance with an extended fan light lying above. The stair case is constructed of course ashlar and rubble and the rear roof has been hipped.



The western elevation has two twelve over twelve, double hung, sashed windows with two smaller six over six windows on the upper storey.

South Elevation



Elements of the original Georgian style are still evident in the southern elevation. The general symmetry of the original home is maintained by the gabled dormers on the upper storey. The westerly dormer contains a ten over ten double hung window while the easterly one has been extended to form an additional rear entrance.

- (1) Powell, Janet R. Annals of the Forty, "Loyalist and Pioneer Families of West Lincoln 1783-1833". P. 75
- (2) Ibid P• 73
- (3) Ibid P• 77
- (4) Ibid P• 76
- (5) Ibid P• 78