

GIBSON HOUSE

114 GIBSON STREET

CIRCA 1860

1.0 History

This house was built by Robert Lillie Gibson, a stone mason (1) and contractor (2), circa 1860.

The Robert Gibson family originally came from Peterhead in Scotland (3). They arrived in Canada to find a suitable site for quarry operations, and after a long search they arrived and settled in Grimsby in about 1860(4). He built this house at the foot of the escarpment just north of his quarry operation.

The railroad played a very crucial role in the union of Canada, and during the railroad building boom of the late 1800's, Robert Gibson secured a contract with the Great Western Railway (GWR). He was to supply the stone and build the bridges for the GWR line from Sarnia, Ontario to Rimouski, Quebec (5). Local area contracts included the construction of Grand Trunk Piers (6). In order to fulfill his contractual obligations, he also owned and operated a quarry in Clinton Township and the Beamsville quarry. He ran these operations until his death in 1884.

The railroad also had a very large role to play in Robert Gibson's personal life. Not only was it a source of his financial wealth, but also his social connections. His wife, Frances Thompson, was the daughter of a GWR Agent from the Winona area (8).

When Robert Gibson passed away in 1884, he left six children behind, the eldest being thirteen years of age. His oldest son became a beneficiary of Robert Gibson's enterprises. However, since he was only thirteen when he inherited the business, William Gibson, Robert's nephew, took over the operations on behalf of the beneficiaries. (9).

William Gibson, who also immigrated from Scotland, was the Gibson Enterprises bookkeeper (10). He essentially took over all of Robert Gibson's interests when Robert passed on. He too became involved in contracting and building. One of his projects included the Welland Canal and other projects which pertained to the railroad. William was also active in Federal Government during the turn of the nineteenth century, and became a Senator in Federal Parliament (11). William died in Beamsville in 1914(12).

## 2.0 Architectural Details

### 2.1 General Description

This two-storey stone dwelling is located on Gibson Street, and is now known municipally as 114 Gibson Street.

The Gibson House is a fine existing example of Gothic design in architecture, although there have been some changes which have altered the original form. The major elements that qualify this structure as Gothic include; the asymmetrical arrangement of features such as window trim details, the use of decorative fascia and trim (gingerbread), the prominent bay window on the facade (north side elevation), the fine Scottish stone work, and the total departure from the more balanced and orderly classical form.

### 2.2 Details of the Three Bay Facade (North Side Elevation)

#### 2.2.1 Roof and Roof Trim

The roof is gabled on this structure, however, since it has an L-shaped plan, it has a primary and a secondary gable. The primary gable is on the east side elevation, with the roof ridge running in an east-west direction; the secondary gable is on the north side elevation and is a portion of the facade.

One unusual feature of the roof is the pitch of the primary and secondary roof - they both have a different pitch. The primary gable is low pitched, while the secondary gable has a medium pitch.

The roof trim consists of a plain soffit and fascia. However, the fascia on the gabled ends are highly decorated and are commonly known as gingerbread trim. An unusual feature is the different design of the gingerbread trim on the primary and secondary gable. The primary gable trim is cut in a series of semi-circles, while the secondary gable (facade) consists of a series of upright and inverted triangles. Both gable ends are adorned by finials and pendants, of the roof peak, which are similar in design. See photos 1 and 2 for roof trim details.

### **2.2.2 Windows**

Generally, the windows have two sashes and are double hung, with a 4 over 4 pane arrangement. The head of the structural opening is flat, trimmed with a plain stone lintel. The sides of the opening have quoined trim and there is a plain stone lug sill. The trim within the structural opening is composed entirely of moulded wood. This description typifies most of the windows of the house.

However, there are some major differences observed on the facade. They are:

I. **First Floor Window, left (as one faces the facade)  
of the Main Entrance**

The structure, trim and form of this window is essentially the same as the general window described above, however, the structural opening is wider. The structural opening is wider to accommodate louvred shutters on either side of the double hung windows. Please refer to photo 3 for a visual idea.

2. **First Floor Bay Window on Gabled Secondary End (Facade, North Side Elevation)**

The front window unit is double hung with a 4 over 4 pane arrangement. The side windows are considerably narrower, and the panes are placed vertically in each sash. The sashes are double hung with a 2 over 2 pane arrangement.

The roof trim consists of a moulded fascia and a plain soffit. Also, there is a moulded frieze below the roof trim.

The window units sit on a moulded wood lug sill, and the entire window unit, including the roof, is constructed of wood. The entire bay window, however, sits on a stone base. Please refer to photo 4 for a photograph of the bay window.

3. **Second Floor Window on Gabled Secondary End  
{Facade. North Side Elevation}**

The structure, trim and form of this upper storey window is essentially the same as the general window described earlier.

The structural opening is wider, however, with smaller windows on either side of the main window. The panes of these smaller windows are arranged vertically in each sash, and the sashes are double hung with a 2 over 2 pane arrangement.

Another feature of this window is the hood. This hood is bracketed by two curved members on either side of the window opening. The hood is trimmed by a gingerbread pattern of the eaves. Please refer to photo 5 for a visual idea.

4. **Attic in Opening**

The trim of this opening is somewhat similar to the general openings, although much smaller in scale. There are two louvered shutters that enclose the opening. Please refer to photo 5.

**2.2.3 Exterior Wall**

The red variegated free stone is arranged in an even course, each stone being irregular in length - this cut stone masonry is commonly referred to as ashlar. The stone has a tooled finish, and was probably excavated from Robert Gibson's quarry. The red variegated free stone construction is typical of the entire house. The corners of the house and all structural openings are plain quoined.

It is noteworthy to mention the quality of the building material that was processed at Gibson's quarry. The following is an excerpt from the Annals of the Forty in regard to Gibson's quarry.

The quarries consist of the very best material of all kinds for building purposes such as Lime, Fire, Free Stone and Red variegated Free Stone, much admired by builders and Architects all of which cannot fail to attract the attention of those living in Lake Towns and Cities(13).

Robert Gibson's house was built from this material, and no doubt many other stately homes of that era were built from stone from Gibson's quarry in Grimsby.

**2.2.4 Main Entrance (Facade - North Side Elevation)**

The main entrance is centrally located on the facade.

The head of the structural opening is slightly curved, or what is referred to as segmental and is trimmed by a plain stone lintel. The side structural opening is trimmed by plain stone quoins.

A moulded wooded frame trims the entire opening; with a pebbled effect glass transom and sidelights on each side of the door. Located at the lower portion of each sidelight is a moulded wood panel.

There is a single door to the main entrance. The upper portion of the door is glassed with a moulded trim around the pane. The lower portion of the door has two rectangular panels.

Please refer to photo 6 for a photograph of the main entrance.

#### **2.2.5 The Porch (Facade - North Side Elevation)**

The open railing porch allows direct access to the main entrance and extends east from the portion of the house that is oriented North/South, to the east facing wall of the East/West oriented portion of the house.

There is no roof or cover over the existing porch. Trellis work covers the space below the floor area of the porch. Please refer to photo 7.

The modern design of the porch is not consistent in keeping with the Gothic character of the house. Apparently, there was once a roofed porch with decorative (gingerbread) trim more in harmony with the rest of the house (14). There is evidence that a roofed porch did exist and this point will be expanded in Section 2.3.

#### **2.3 Evidence of Major Alterations on the Facade**

It has been noted that there was once a roofed porch with decorative trim in keeping with the Gothic character of the house. There is visible evidence in regard to the pre-existing porch on the north exterior wall of the East/West oriented portion of the house.

Above the main entrance and first storey window is located a band of small flat rectangular stones, set in mortar, running almost the entire length of the wall. It is believed that this band patches what was once some structural mounting plate for the porch roof. The smaller stones may have served as a patch, since the mortar is of a different colour than the mortar that is used to bind the stone masonry of the house, the latter being reddish and former whitish in colour. Please refer to photo 8 for evidence of alteration.

Also, there is an existing photograph that shows the porch and details of the trim that once appeared on the house (please refer to Figure 1 of the North side elevation).

## **2.4 East Side Elevation - Refer to Photo 9**

### **2.4.3 Roof Trim**

The trim of the primary gable has been noted in Section 2.2.1

### **2.4.4 Windows**

Both upper and lower storey windows are similar to the type of window described in 2.2.2.

## **2.5 South Side Elevation - Refer to Photo 10 \*evidence of wooden extension**

### **2.5.3 Roof Trim**

The rear gable of the secondary portion of the house is on the south side. The gable and roof trim, however, are not decorated as the other gables mentioned earlier.

Both the soffit and fascia are plain, and not decorative along the verges and eaves.

### **2.5.4 Windows**

Upper storey windows are similar to the general window described in 2.2.2.

There are two lower storey windows. The window on the right (east side) is typical of the type found on the house. The one to the left (west side), has a single recessed opening in the top portion, the lower portion has a single paned storm window and former door,

There is one unusual window located in what would be approximately the center of the south side elevation. It is extremely large, and it vertically occupies both upper and lower storey levels of the house.

The reason for its extreme size is that it serves to light the stairway for both floors of the house. This window is double hung with a 4 over 6 pane arrangement, and is trimmed similarly as the majority of the house.

## **2.6 West Side Elevation - Refer to Photo 11**

Many of the architectural details and features that are generally found on the house are evident on this side.

However, much of the exterior wall has been covered with mortar to patch cracks, therefore, much of the detail of the wall has been removed.

## **2.7 The Extension**

A one and a half storey gabled extension is located at the south side of the main house. The wall is of a similar material as the main house, but is laid in a more crude manner. The roof trim, both fascia and soffit, is plain around the entire structure.

### **2.1.1 East Side Elevation - Refer to Photo 12**

Details of the east side include an entranceway. The trim around the opening is plain. The door has a 6 paned upper portion and a paneled lower portion.

The window has a 6 over 6 pane arrangement. All other details of the window are similar to other windows of the main house.

### **2.1.2 South Side Elevation - Refer to Photo 13**

The south side extension has evidence of a previous extension. Formerly, there was a summer kitchen room, which was of wood frame construction. This summer kitchen was removed approximately 20 years ago and the door on the south side of the house leading to the kitchen filled in.

There is one window with a 6 over 6 pane arrangement. Its trim and details are consistent with other windows of the house.

## END NOTES

1. Register of Properties in the Town of Grimsby
2. Assessment Roll, Village of Grimsby, 1877
3. Mrs. R. Gibson
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Register of Properties in the Town of Grimsby
7. Mrs. R. Gibson
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. J.K. Johnson ed., Canadian Directory of Parliament. 1867 - 1967  
(Public Archives of Canada, 1968)
12. Ibid.
13. R. Janet Powell comp. Annals of the Fort No. 10 Grimsby  
1816 - 1876 (Published by the Grimsby Historical Society, 1959)  
P. 73
14. Mrs. R. Gibson



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

finial - a small roof ornament which terminates in a point

lintel - a horizontal structural member which supports the weight of the wall above

low pitch - the pitch rises less than thirty-five degrees

lug sill - a horizontal member extending beyond the vertical sides of the window frame

medium pitch - the pitch rises between thirty-five to fifty-five degrees

pendant - an ornament suspended from the roof edge

quoins - squared members, usually laid alternatively with small and large faces, distinguished from adjacent members by size, may be structural or decorative

segmental - the opening is slightly curved forming an angle where it joins the sides

variegated - marked with irregular patches of different colours

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gibson, Mrs. Robert, granddaughter by marriage of Robert Lillie Gibson,  
phone interview, July 2, 1987

Johnson, J.K. ed., Canadian Directory of Parliament, 1867 - 1967  
(Public Archives of Canada, 1968)

Powell, P. Janet, comp., Annals of the Forty No, 10 Grimsby 1816 - 1876  
(Published by the Grimsby Historical Society, 1959)

Town of Grimsby, Register of Properties

Village of Grimsby, Assessment Roll, 1877

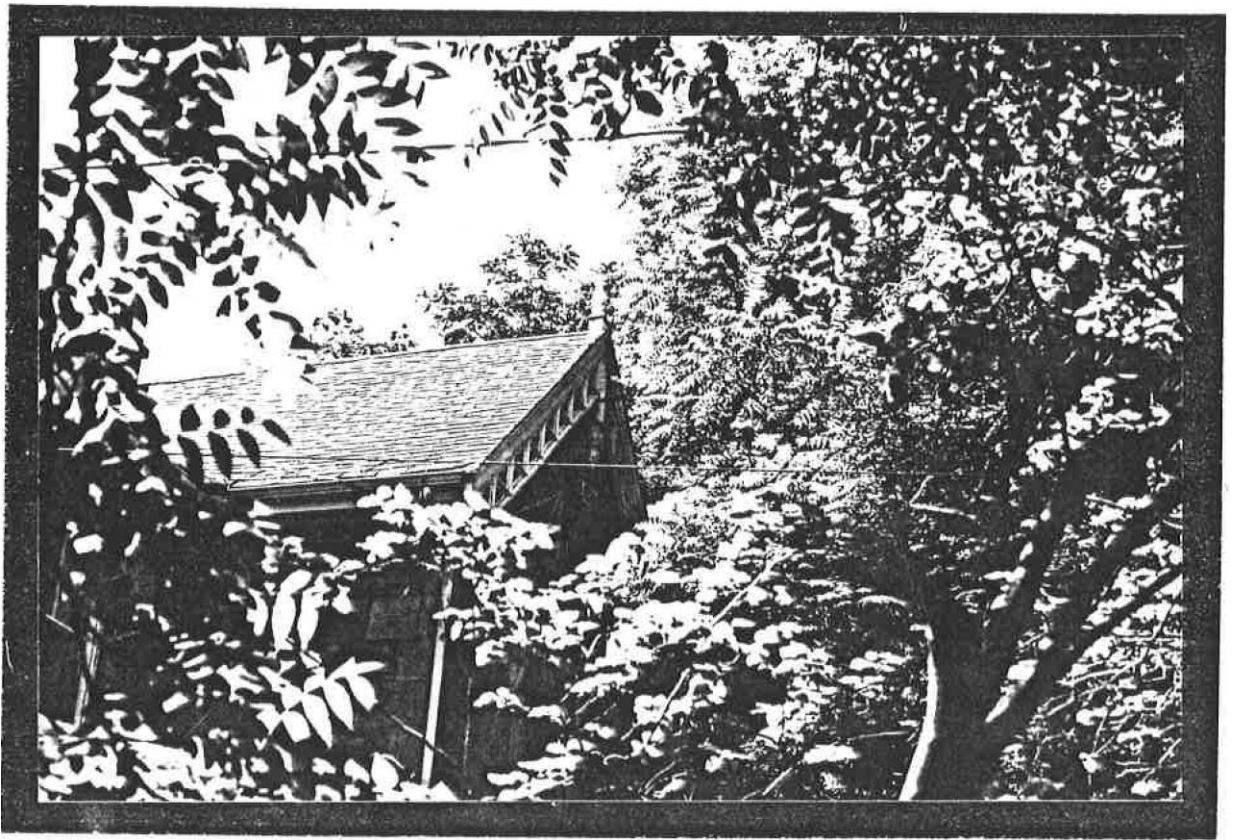


PHOTO 1 NORTH SIDE GABLE END DETAILING ROOF TRIM

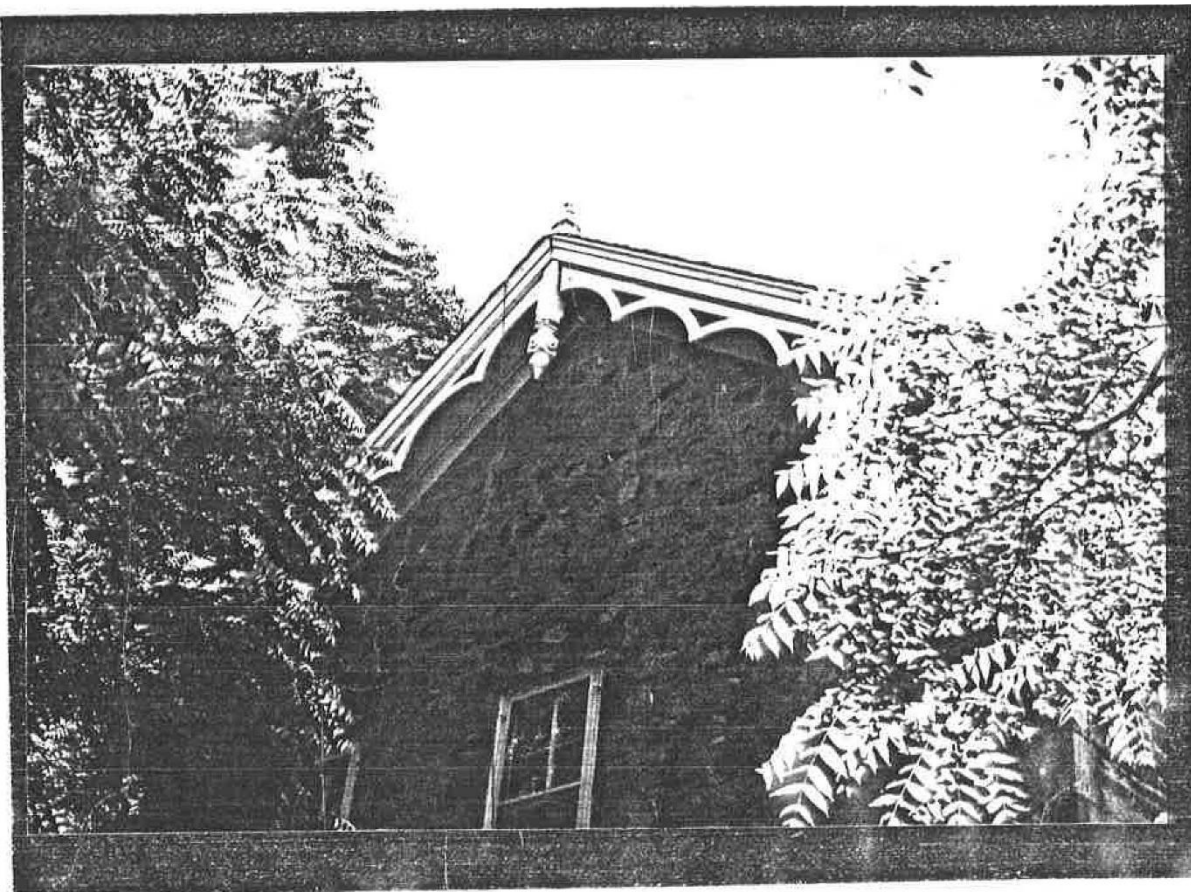


PHOTO 2 EAST SIDE GABLE END DETAILING ROOF TRIM

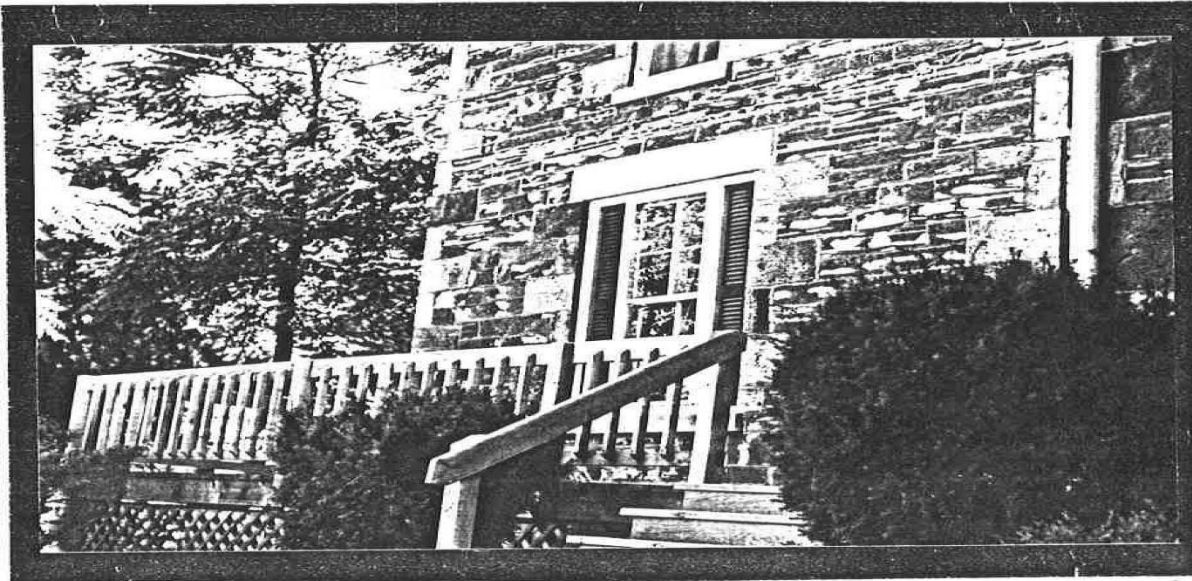


PHOTO 3 FIRST FLOOR WINDOW BESIDE MAIN ENTRANCE (NORTH SIDE)

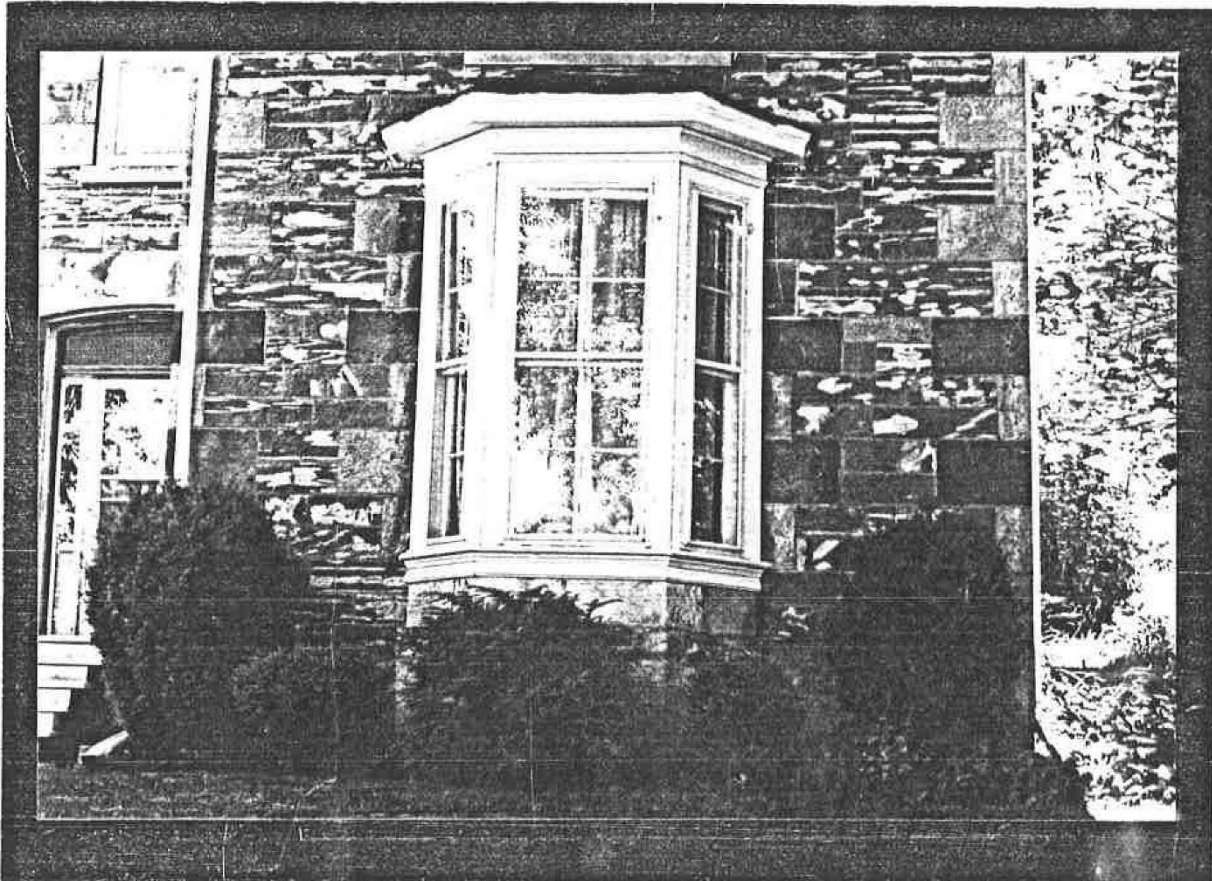


PHOTO 4 BAY WINDOW (NORTH SIDE)



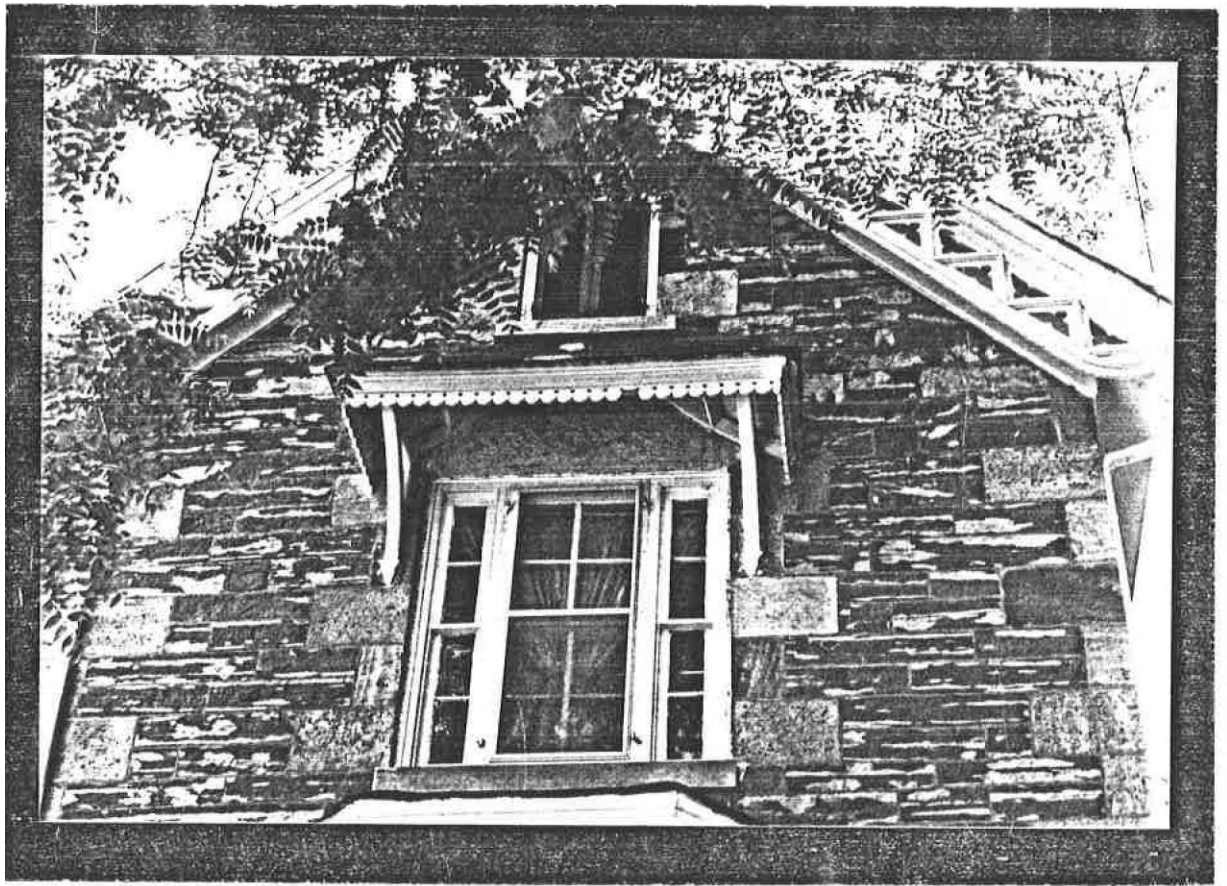


PHOTO 5 NORTH SIDE GABLED END DETAILING THE UPPER STOREY WINDOW AND BRACKETED HOOD

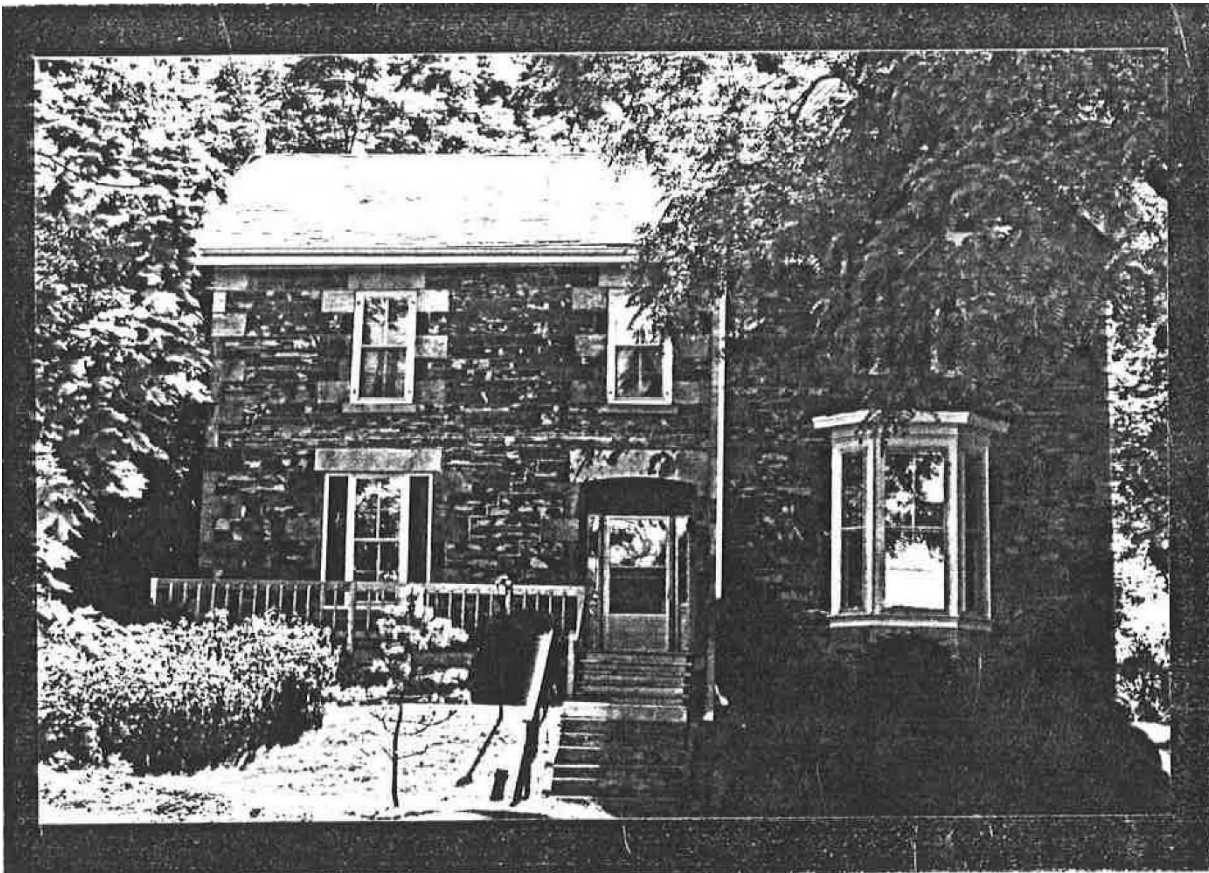


PHOTO 6 MAIN ENTRANCE AND NORTH SIDE ELEVATION

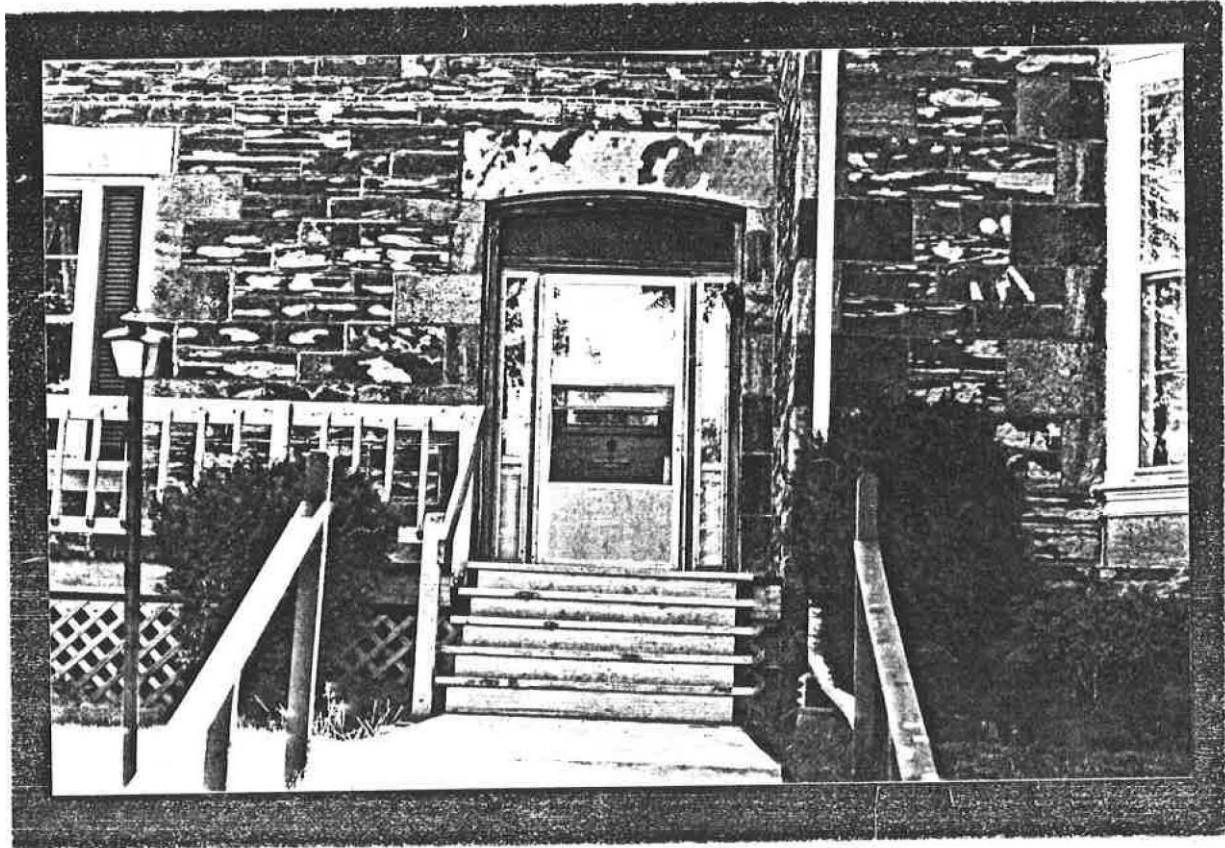


PHOTO 7 MAIN ENTRANCE AND THE TYPE OF TRELLIS WORK ON PORCH

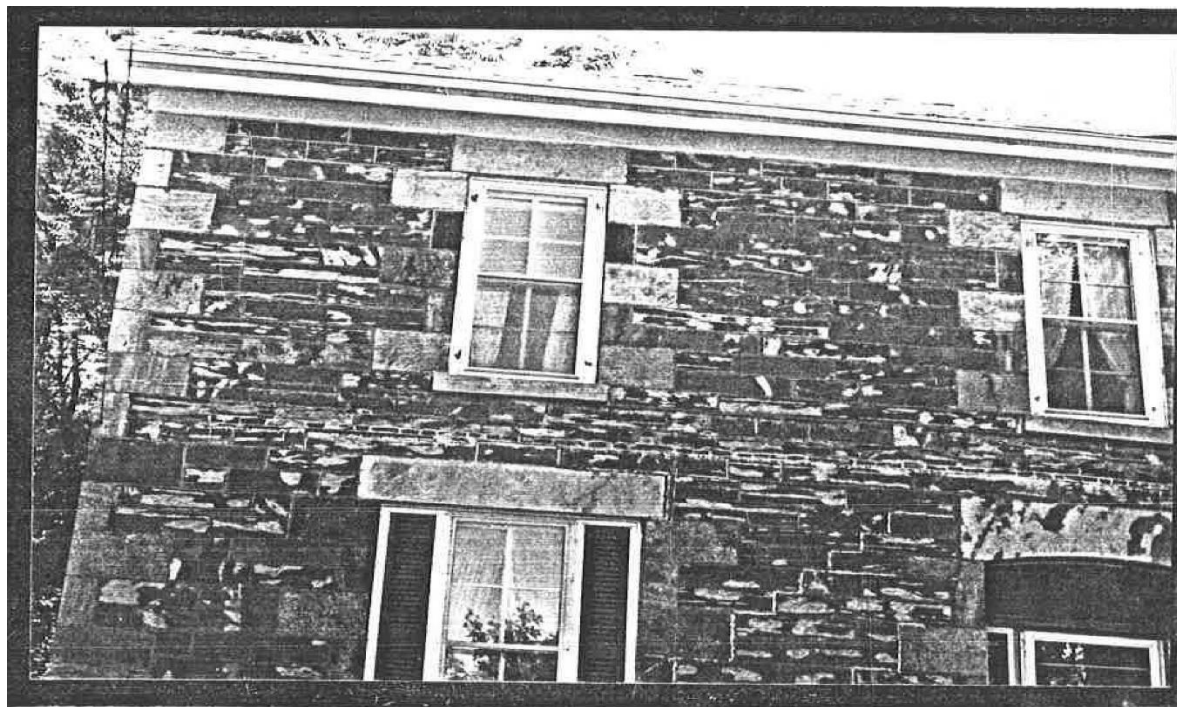


PHOTO 8 - EVIDENCE OF ALTERATIONS  
NOTE THE BAND OF SMALL STONES BETWEEN UPPER AND LOWER  
STOREY WINDOWS





PHOTO 9 EAST SIDE  
ELEVATION OF MAIN  
HOUSE

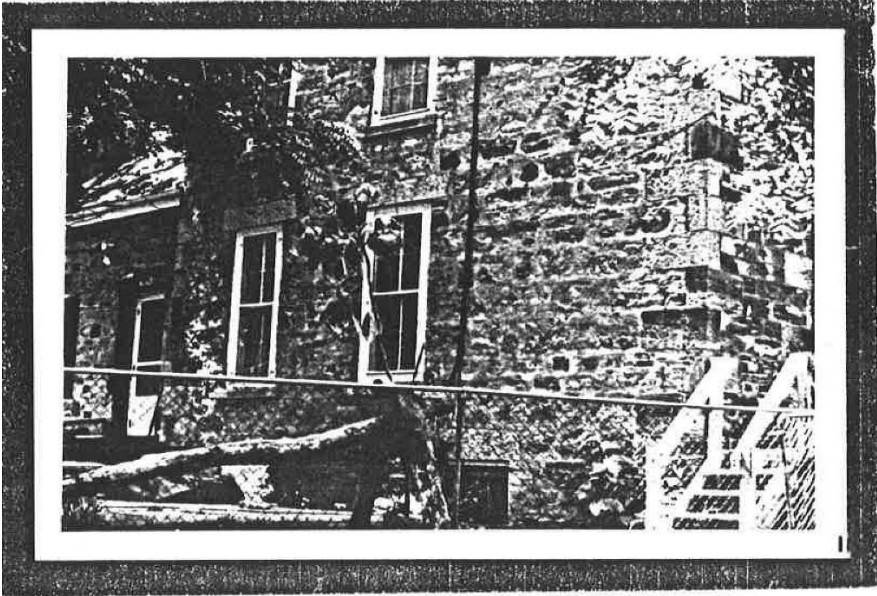


PHOTO OF THE UPPERPORTIONS OF THE EASTSIDE





PHOTO 10 SOUTH SIDE PLAIN GABLES END OF MAIN HOUSE

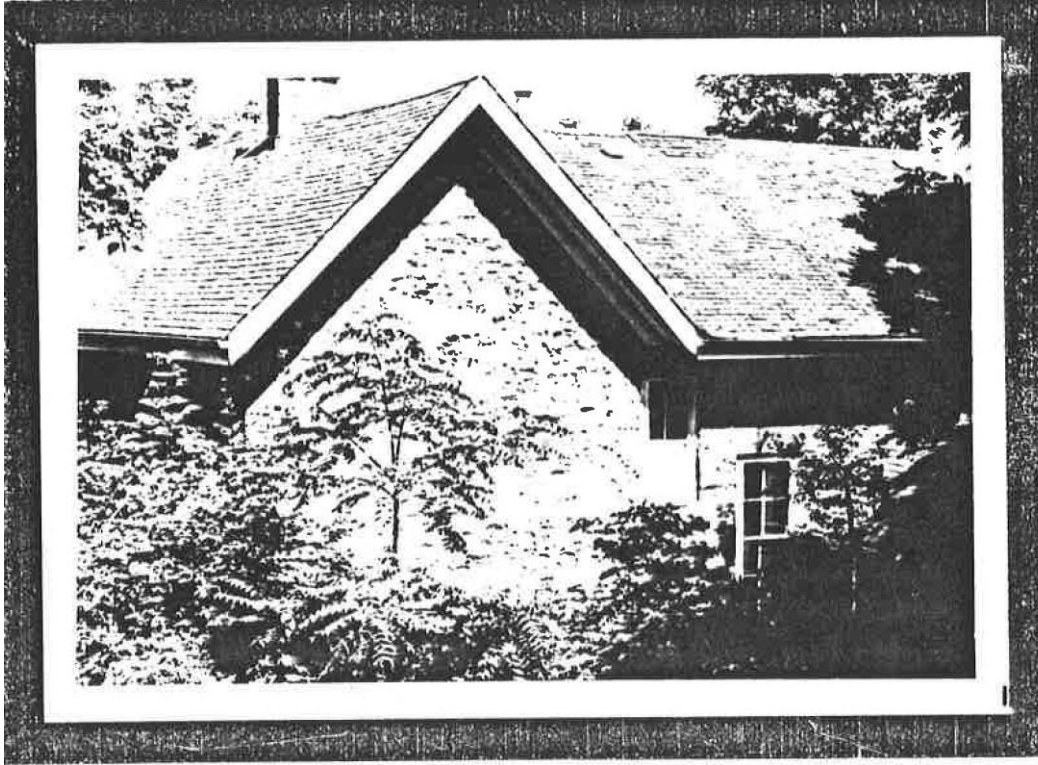
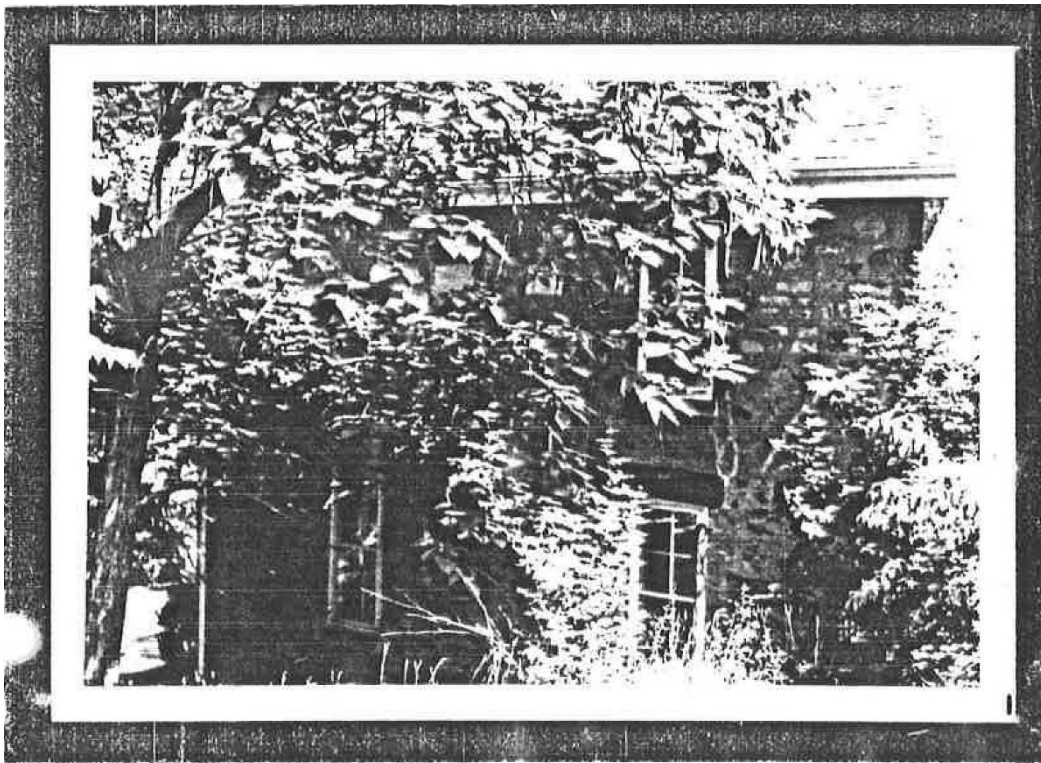


PHOTO 11 WEST SIDE OF MAIN HOUSE



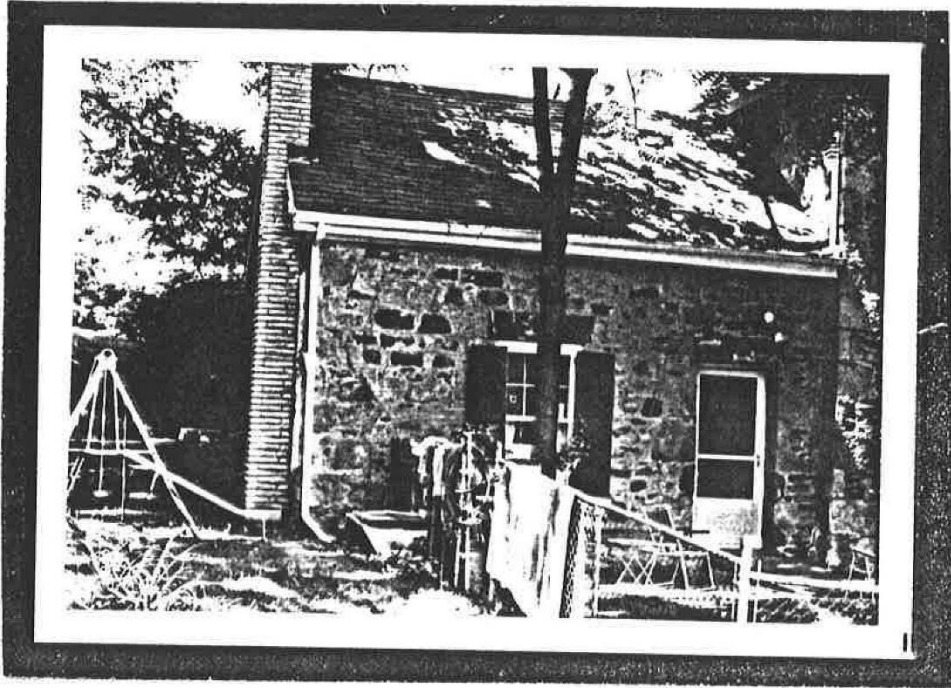
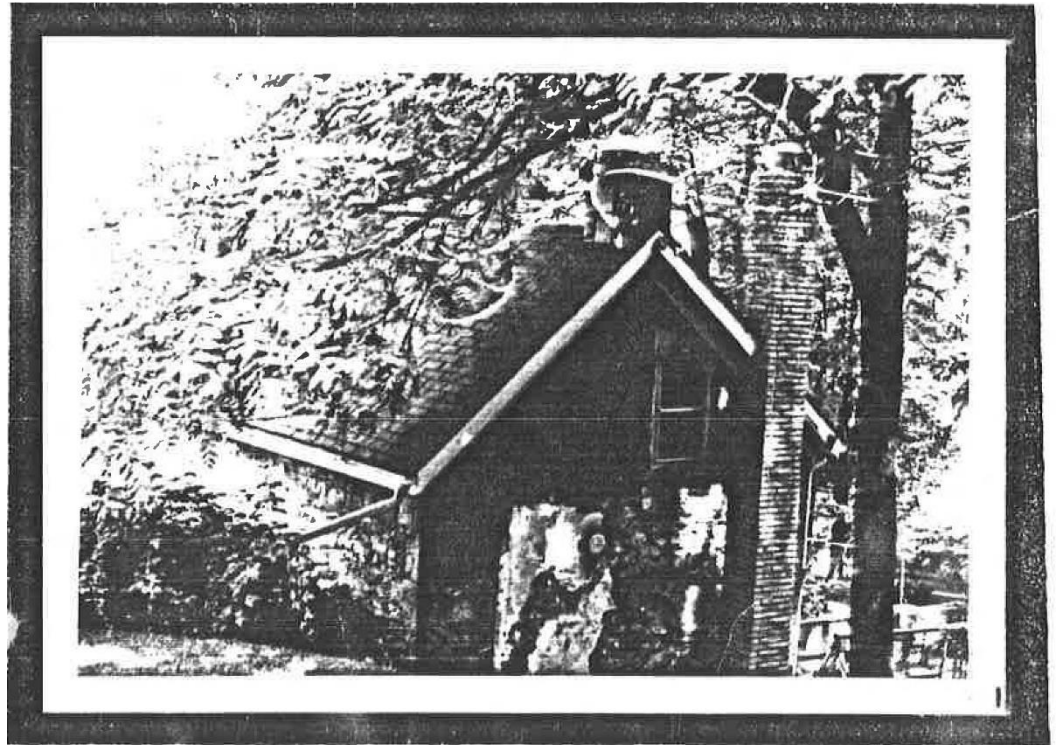
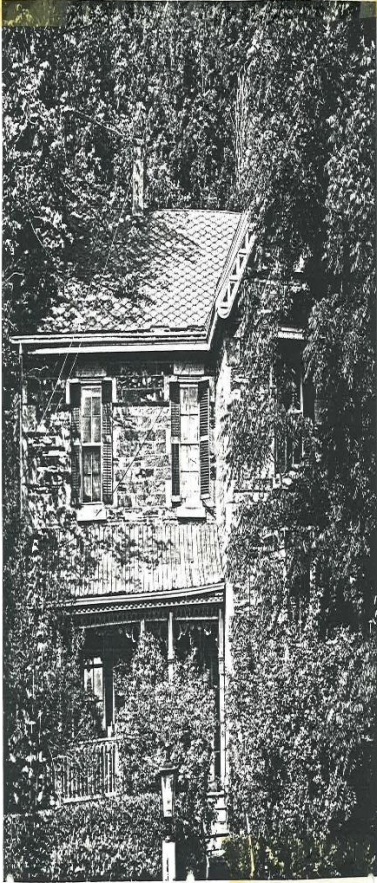


PHOTO 12 WEST SIDE  
ELEVATION OF EXTENSION

PHOTO 13 SOUTH SIDE OF EXTENSION





GIBSON HOUSE FACADE FROM GIBSON  
AVENUE (NORTH SIDE ELEVATION)  
SHOWING THE OLD PORCH  
Source: Grimsby museum

*Figure 1*

