

Preliminary Research Report

5446 Sherkston Road/825 Pleasant Beach Road

Port Colborne, ON submitted by Nora A. Reid, M.A., Hist. of Art, Feb. 2024.

This property contains three separate structures:

1. Old blacksmith shop 5446 Sherkston Road facing Sherkston Road (Figs. 1 - 4)

This is a small one storey building facing Sherkston Road with two garage style doors and a peaked roof that is bell cast at front (Fig. 1). Local oral tradition has long maintained that this was once a blacksmith shop for the area¹. This is supported by both the general appearance of the building and the historical record.

The structure has three six paned windows on the west side (Fig. 2), one six paned window on the east side and a wooden slat door on the north side with strap hinges (Figs. 3-4). The windows and door have an appearance of age. It can be assumed that the roof is much more recent as is the stucco on the walls.²

The entire property was purchased by 30-year-old Abner J. Lee in 1895 who owned it until 1911. Humberstone Township Assessment Rolls between 1896 and 1911 list Abner Lee as a blacksmith. Later Rolls (1907 to 1910) also include a business tax assessment. Details: please see History of Property below, p.p. 15-18.

Age: given the above, it is safe to assume that this building was likely constructed by or for Abner J. Lee as a blacksmith shop in 1895 and used for that purpose until he sold the property in 1911. It is unknown whether this is the only 19th century blacksmith shop still in existence on the Sherkston area.



Fig. 1 Old Blacksmith Shop south side 5446 Sherkston Road facing Sherkston Road



Fig. 2 Old Blacksmith Shop west side 5446 Sherkston Road



Fig. 3 Old Blacksmith Shop east side 5446 Sherkston Road



Fig. 4 Old Blacksmith Shop north Side 5446 Sherkston Road

2. Old Stables 5446 Sherkston Road/825 Pleasant Beach Road facing Pleasant Beach Road (Figs. 5-9)

Current owner Toni Pidsadnick states that this is believed to be the oldest building on the property and was originally used as a stable for horses. Currently the ground floor is used for storage and the second floor is a rental unit.³ The second storey appears to have been added later. As the entire building is stuccoed there are no visible clues to confirm this. However this is supported both by the buildings appearance and family oral tradition.

This is a two storey L-shaped building with peaked roofs and dormers with a one story extension with shed roof on the north side. Front façade ground floor (Fig. 5) facing Pleasant Beach Road has two garage type doors flanked on either side by two four over four windows, and an entrance door at the south end. On the second story above the garage doors under the peak is a set of three double hung windows. To the right of these is a second story dormer containing a set of paired windows. A smaller second storey dormer is located at the back of the building on the east façade (Fig. 7).

The windows on the ground floor appear original - older double hung wooden windows with 4 over 4 panes on front (east) façade (Figs. 5 and 6) and 2 over 2 panes on all the other sides (Figs. 7-9) whereas all the second story double hung windows are single

paned and appear much newer, supporting the conclusion that this was originally a stable that was later expanded and upgraded for residential use.⁴

This was confirmed in a post on the “Sherkston – the Town” Facebook page by Cindy Fraser, a descendant of the Benner family who owned the property from 1925 to 2009 (Details on Benner family please see [History of Property](#) below).

Ms. Fraser posted:

The garage /apartment was created about ? A neighbor complained to Grandpa Benner that it should be torn down. Stubborn Grandpa, added the apartment and had wonderful tenants for years.

Jerry and Mary Sherk

Kerkulfs?

Ruth Benner and Carol Coopman for 30 years.



Fig. 5 Old stables facing Pleasant Beach Road west side



Fig. 6 Old stables west and south sides



Fig. 7 Old stable south and east sides



Fig. 8 Old stables east and north sides



Fig. 9 Old stables north side

3. House 5446 Sherkston Road/825 Pleasant Beach Road facing Sherkston Road (Figs. 10 –20)

This house is L-shaped and consists of two houses joined together. The oldest part of the main house faces Sherkston Road and is a rectangular two storey wing with a central front gable in the eave of the upper storey (Figs 10-12). The front gable is decorated with “fish scale” shingles.⁵

The north wing creating the tail of the “L” facing Pleasant Beach Road (Figs. 13-14) was moved onto the property sometime after the original house was constructed. The current owner states that evidence for this north section being originally a separate house can be seen in the attic, where the north wing is a full 18 inches lower than the front (south) wing.⁶

The architectural style of the original part of the house facing Sherkston Road appears to reflect the style of an “Ontario House” – a type of small one and one-half storey farmhouse with a central front gable in the eave of the upper storey. A window or windows in the central peak gave light to the upper storey. This was the most popular form of farm dwelling in Ontario from the 1840’s to the 1870’s.

“Ontario Houses” were usually limited to one and one-half storeys due to tax laws. However, as time went on many of these were enlarged, as this one was, by adding a “tail” giving it an L shaped plan.⁷ It is likely that the upper part became a full second storey when the second house was moved to the property and attached to the north side.

Age:

The architectural style as well as the historical record supports an early date for the original (south) wing of the house, possibly as early as the 1870’s.

Blacksmith Abner J. Lee purchased the 1 ½ acre property for \$1000.00 in 1895, a value that would indicate that there were structures, likely more than one, on the property at the time. Although the name the person he purchased from is less than legible in the records, it appears to be Samuel Zavitz, who himself purchased 1 ½ acres, part lot 2 for \$700.00 from Joseph House in 1885. Once again the value indicates the presence of buildings on the property during the early 1880’s.

A sale from 20 May 1866 of 1 ½ acres of Lot 2, Concession 1 “on the north side of the Fort Erie Road” for only \$155.00 suggests there was no building on the property at that

time and that the original house was probably constructed during the 1870's, after 1866 and before the 1880's. Further research would be needed to narrow this down. (Details please see History of Property below).

No further information is available at this time about the origins of the second house and when it was added as a north wing. As to the date that this occurred, the historical record does provide for some speculation. Humberstone Township Assessment Rolls show the Lee family growing from a family of four in 1897 to a family of nine in 1910 which suggests a need to expand the area of the house to accommodate a growing family. (Details please see History of Property below).

Porch, south and west sides; large front (picture windows) south side (Figs 11,12,19, 20): Circa 1900 to 1920's.

The wrap around front porch was added after both wings were in place and reflects a much later, early twentieth century style, "Edwardian Classical" Porches with short colonettes with classical capitals (in this case Ionic scrolls) set on square piers were a feature of this style. The central peak over the front door has a sunburst design . Although it has had some alterations (see Alterations below) its overall early 20th century character remains intact.

Given its architectural style, this porch was likely built sometime between 1900 and 1930 when Edwardian Classicism was in vogue.⁸ This may have been done by blacksmith Abner Lee, who owned the property until 1911, Minister Noah Honsberger who purchased it in 1920 or possibly even by the Benner family who purchased it in 1925. It is possible but unlikely that the owners from 1911 to 1920, the Kennedys, would have made this type of upgrade as the Assessment Rolls for those years list them as out-of-town landlords.

The two large (picture) windows under the front porch were also likely added around the same period as panes of glass of that size were not commonly used until the turn of the twentieth century.

Alterations:

As well as the addition of the wrap around front porch and two large front "picture" windows, the following 20th century alterations were observed during the site visit February 3rd and by comparing the current photos of the house to those taken in the 1930's:

- Piers supporting half columns of the porch were originally wood and have been replaced by stone; wooden railings and spindles have been removed (compare Figs.10 through 13 to Fig. 16; 19-20)
- Original clapboard siding has been replaced with new siding
- Original two over two double hung windows have been replaced with newer single pane double hung windows (compare Figs. 13-14 and Fig. 17)
- Front “picture” windows replaced. Originals had rectangular transom above (stained glass?). Current windows have sliding windows at bottom (compare Figs. 10-12 and Figs.19-20).
- It appears the front door was once located in a more central position under the porch and roof dormer gables and is now offset to one side (compare Fig 19 to Fig. 20 and Fig 12).



Fig. 10. House, 5446 Sherkston Road, south (front) façade facing Sherkston Road



Fig. 11. Front (south) façade



Fig. 12
Detail of sunburst pattern on front porch
pediment over entrance door



Fig. 13. Porch and west side, house at 5446 Sherkston Road/825 Pleasant Beach Road



Fig. 14. Porch and west side, house at 5446 Sherkston Road/825 Pleasant Beach Road



Fig. 15 North side of house, 5446 Sherkston Road



Fig. 16 East side of house, 5446 Sherkston Road



Fig. 17 West side of house, 5446 Sherkston Road, photo taken circa 1930's
Figures 17 through 20 all taken by Benner family during the 1930's.



Fig. 18 Benner family outside house during 1930's



Fig. 19 Benner children outside front of house, 1930's.



Fig. 20 Front façade of house c. 1930's

History of Property

The property went through a number of owners over the last 200 years, including many family names familiar in the early history of Humberstone including Skinner, Schooley, Sherk and Zavitz. Blacksmith Abner J. Lee owned it from 1895 to 1911 and the Alvin Benner (Fraser) family purchased the property in 1925 and owned it for over 80 years between 1925 and 2009. The Benners had three daughters and one son, John. Their youngest daughter Millie married a Fraser.

Land transactions

All transactions cited are from Niagara South Registry Office Historical Records, Abstract/Parcel Registry books, Part Lot 2 Concession 1 Humberstone

The Crown Patent on this land went Aaron Skinner, 200 acres on lot 2 in 1795. It appears that it then passed to Abraham Laing (Bargain and Sale, 200 acres, reg. no. 2669). Abraham Laing sold Isaac Laing 165 acres in 1808 (B&S, May 15, 1808, reg. no. 5432). Asa Schooley inherited the property from Laing and sold the south 2 ½ acres to Salome Sherk in 1829 (B&S, April 13, 1829 reg. no. 8233). The next transaction that

appears to refer to this property is a sale by Elais Sherk and wife to Abraham Shisler in 1862 (reg. no. 10812). Online reproductions of abstract parcel registry transactions during the mid 1800s are of poor quality and bear further research to confirm.

However the following almost certainly refer to this parcel of land and can be directly traced to the current owners:

- sale in 1866 by Abraham Shisler to Henry Mckibben (sp?) of 1 ½ acres on the north side of Fort Erie Road for \$ 155.00 (reg. no. 764)
- sale registered in 1871 Henry McKibben to Chloe Ramsden, 1 ½ acres on north side of Fort Erie Road for \$400.00 (reg. no. 495?)
- Probate of will of Chloe Ramsden in 1877 leaving 20 acres to J. Vanderburgh (reg. no. 1597)
- sale 7 Dec. 1882, John R. Vanderburgh to Joseph House, 1 ½ acres, \$800.00 (B&S, reg. no. 2522)
- sale Sept. 29, 1885 by Joseph House to Samuel A. Zavitz of 1 ½ acres, part lot 2 for \$700.00 (B&S, reg. no. 2959)
- sale, 6 Mar. 1895, Samuel A. Zavitz to Abner J. Lee; 1 ½ acres for \$1000.00 (B&S, reg. no. 4936)
- sale, 11 March 1911, Abner. J. Lee to Eliza Kennedy and Mary J. Kennedy, 1 ½ acres part lot 2 for \$1800.00 (B&S, reg. no. 8522)
- sale, 20 April 1920, Eliza A. and Mary J. Kennedy, 1 ½ acres part lot 2 to Noah Honsberger (sp?) for \$2300.00 (Grant, reg. no. 10464)
- sale, April 1925, Noah Honsberger, widower, to Alvin B. Benner, 1 ½ acres part lot 2 for \$3000.00 (Grant, reg. no. 11286)

The property remained in the Benner family until it was sold by Margaret Benner, John Fraser and Robert Fraser to Glen Pidsadnick and Toni Hemmati in 2009, who remain the current owners (Transfer, June 12, 2009, reg. no. SN247483).

Humberstone Township Assessment Rolls

Registry Office records are restricted to land transactions (sales, mortgages etc.). Assessment Rolls however were prepared yearly and the early rolls contain a wealth of information including names, occupations, no. of people resident in family, cattle, pigs, horses etc. along with assessments of land value and for some years valuation of land and buildings separately.

1897 Assessment Roll lists Abner Lee, blacksmith, age 30 as owner of 1 ½ acres, part lot 2, with four in the family. Value of property \$400.00

1898 Assessment Roll – same as 1897 with exception of one birth during the year; 5 in family. 1 hog, 1 horse.

1899 and 1900 Assessment Rolls – no change

1901 Assessment Roll – only change 1 birth in year, 6 in family, 1 cow, 2 hogs, 1 horse, 3 dogs

1902 through 1904- no change

1905 Assessment Roll – This year indicates that the family had grown to 7 people and the Lees were members of the Methodist Church. The Roll divides the property value into value of property only at \$50.00 and value of buildings at \$350.00 for a total of \$400.00 and adds a business assessment of \$250.00 for a total assessment of \$650.00

1907 Assessment Roll – Lee, Abner, blacksmith, 39 years old, 8 in family with last birth May 16, 1906. Property assessed at \$50.00, buildings at \$485.00, and business assessment of \$115.00 for total of \$650.00

1910 Assessment Roll – Abner Lee, 44, real property (land) assessed at \$75.00, value of buildings \$475.00 and business assessment at \$100.00 for total of \$650.00. Another birth was recorded that year on February 18th making a total of 9 people in the family.

Between 1911 and 1917 the Assessment Rolls list Liza A. and Mary J. Kennedy as owners. The value of the buildings in the 1917 Assessment jumped to \$650.00, land was assessed at \$150.00 for a total of \$800.00. This Roll also indicates that the Kennedys were non-resident landowners, with their home address listed at Mulgraw, Ont.

1920 Assessment Roll – lists owner Noah Hunsberger as Minister (no denomination given). Value of land \$150.00, buildings \$650.00 for total assessment of \$800.00.

References:

- 1 Interview, Feb. 2, 2024 with current owner Toni Pidsadnick.
- 2 Site visit, Feb. 3, 2024.
- 3 Interview, T. Pidsadnick, Feb. 2, 2024
- 4 Site visit, Feb. 3, 2024
- 5 Site visit, Feb. 3, 2024
- 6 T. Pidsadnick, interview Feb. 2nd and site visit Feb. 3, 2024

⁷ Ondaatje, K. Old Ontario Houses, p. 530

⁸ Blumenson, J. Ontario Architecture, p.p. 166 to 175.

Picture credits: Figs 1-15; Nora Reid

Figs. 16-19 from T. Pidsadnick; also posted on Sherkston "The Town" Facebook page

Recommendation:

Owners of this property over the years include many associated with early Humberstone Township settlers and there is more historical data to be found on these early families.

The oldest part of the house facing Sherkston Road dates back at least to the 1880's, likely the 1870's and while there have been a number of alterations over the years the basic characteristics of an "Ontario House" farmhouse style are still evident. Its early 20th century porch has also retained most of its original fabric and character especially in the upper portion with some alterations to the lower half. The character of the former stable building north of the house can also be discerned despite the later addition of a second storey and this building also likely was constructed during the second half of the 19th century.

Of particular interest, however, with regard to designation under the Ontario Heritage Act is the presence of the old Abner Lee Blacksmith Shop facing Sherkston Road dating to 1895 which survives in large part unchanged with original windows, door and roofline. It may be the last surviving Blacksmith Shop in Sherkston but that would need further research to confirm.

This feature alone would recommend that the Port Colborne Heritage Advisory Committee consider the entire property for potential heritage designation.