

Elmira Walking/Wheeling Tour—Route 1

Note: Most of the buildings on this tour are privately owned; please respect the rights of the owners.

1. 31 Church Street East



This house, built of locally-made brick in 1856 by Casper Ruppel, is reputed to be the oldest brick house in Elmira. Originally 1-1/2 stories, the house underwent significant alteration in 1910 when the roof was raised to make a second story. The nun's coif dormer (a Regency feature), the porch roof, and the decorative bargeboard trim in the dormer and end gables were also added at that time.

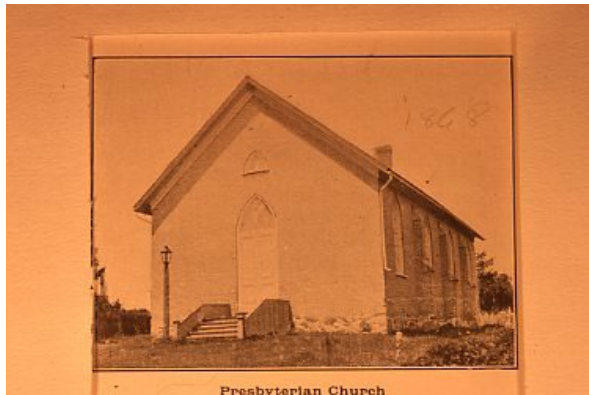
Despite these changes, the plainer Georgian style of the original house is still evident. Georgian architecture was very popular in Ontario in the 19th century, and is characterized by its rectangular shape and symmetrical façade. The centrally-placed doorway here with sidelights and rectangular transom, and the symmetrical arrangement of the windows are all Georgian features. So too are the balanced chimneys inset at each end of the roofline.

2. 29 Church Street East



This two-story house, built shortly after the neighbouring Casper Ruppel house, is another example of Georgian architecture. The characteristic symmetry remains, although the sidelights and transom have been closed in, probably when the porch was added around 1910. Notice the extended eaves return (most evident on the west sidewall), another typical Georgian feature. The rear extension on the house is original and would have served as a summer kitchen. Note holes for porch rafters on the front façade. In 1873, St. Paul's Lutheran Church bought the house to use as a parsonage.

3. Cross Street, Former Gale Presbyterian Church



Before continuing down Church Street, take a short detour to the right on Cross Street to the former Gale Presbyterian Church. Built in 1868 (left photo), this church is named after Rev. Alexander Gale, a professor at Knox College, Toronto, who headed a program in the 1840's to give student ministers a chance to preach. These students came to the church in Winterbourne, the closest Presbyterian church before this church was built.

This building was altered considerably in 1906, but care was taken to blend the additions and the old building into a pleasing whole. The right-hand (north) portion of the building is the original structure. The front façade was very simple, with a tall Gothic-arch central entrance. A close look at the brick reveals where the doorway was bricked in and replaced by the round window. Notice too the three buttresses and four Gothic windows in the north wall of the original building.

In 1906, the left-hand foyer, the short tower and the annex were added, while the impressive round window replaced the old doorway. The tower with its flared eaves adds distinction to the new entrance, and its fish-scale shingling is echoed in the decorative south gable end. The Gothic windows in the south side tie in with the original ones on the north side.

Return to Church Street and continue right to the Arthur Street intersection.

4. 7-9 Arthur Street North

The intersection of Arthur and Church streets has been the core of Elmira's business district since the early days. Some of the early commercial buildings still remain. A Georgian style building dating from about the 1860's to sometime after 1985 stood here prior to Shopper's Drug Mart. Another building of similar vintage lay just to the north.

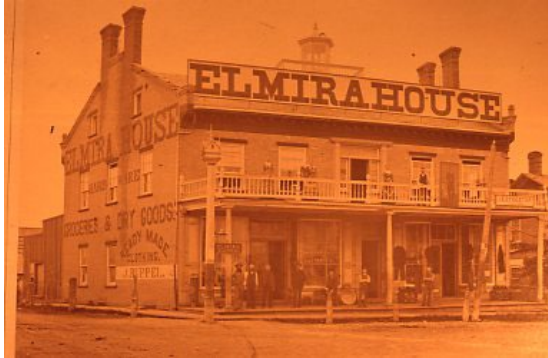


7 Arthur N.--Shopper's Drug Store site
1879—Hardware store

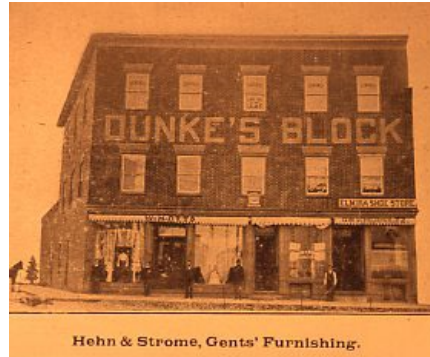


9 Arthur N.—Site of parking lot
1880-- James Nicol, General Merchant

5. 3 and 7 Arthur Street South



3-7 Arthur St. S. in 1860's



3-7 Arthur St. S. in 1903

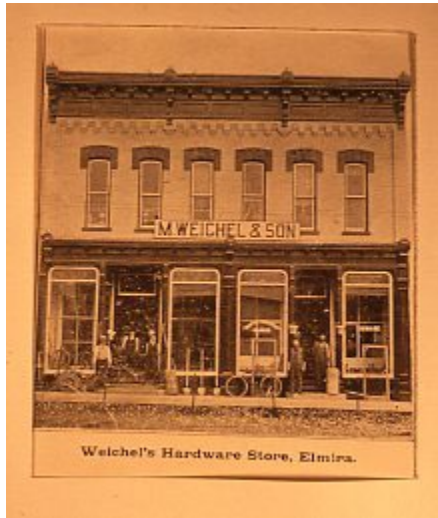
In 1861, Isaac Wenger, a tailor, and John Ruppel erected a two-story building called the Elmira House on the lots now occupied by Re/Max and Brubacher's Shoe Store. An early photo shows that the brick building was in the Georgian style, with symmetrically placed windows, central doorways with sidelights, paired chimneys at each gable end, and a belvedere surrounded by a small widow's walk on the roof. Verandas extended the length of both the upper and lower stories. The post office was located in this building with John Ruppel as postmaster.

In the 1890's this attractive building was altered considerably with the addition of the third story. The verandas were removed and the first story was converted to modern storefronts. During this period the building was known as Dunke's Block, as large lettering above the second-story windows indicated. A series of general stores, shoe stores, and a "Gents' furnishing" business occupied the Dunke's Block. Prior to 1912, the library operated from the second-floor quarters on the south side of the building.

A 1903 photo shows the Elmira Shoe Store occupying the portion of Dunke's Block that is now the site of Brubacher's Shoe Store. In 1948, a fire razed the block (photo below) and new buildings were constructed.



6. 9 Arthur Street South



After carrying on a blacksmithing business on Church Street from 1868 to 1880, Michael Weichel built the present Italianate building in the late 1880's. Although the first story of the front façade has been altered, the second story, with its narrow, round-headed windows and label surround, and corbelled brick under the wide, bracketed eaves, remains much as it was originally.

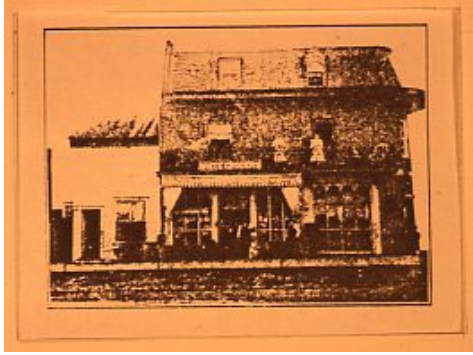
Take a moment to walk a block down Arthur St. S. to Mill St. Below on the left is a photo from the 1880's-90's showing Elmira Fair Day, showing a streetscape from Mill back up toward Church St. Compare to the 2024 photo on the right.



7. 2 Arthur Street South

Before crossing Arthur Street, take a look at the mansard roof of the building on the southwest corner of the intersection. Unusual in Elmira, this style of roof with a steep lower slope and flat top belongs to the Second Empire style of architecture, popular from 1860-1880. (However, the aerial view above from 1948 of the fire across the street shows a triangular roof.) The building was built sometime before 1878. The first two stories of the building have been considerably altered since then. An early 20th century photo shows two women sitting on a second story balcony with an ironwork railing. Ironwork trim often decorated the Second Empire style. A graceful line of floor-to-ceiling arched windows extended the length of the first story, with a doorway on the south portion of the front façade.

Until the 1940's, the building was occupied by a series of general stores and groceries. In 1878 Joshua Bowman had a grocery and sold shoes and boots. The photo on the right was of the same building in 1985.



Sometime between 1882 and 1886, Weber and Erb operated a general store here. Brubacher Shoes was located here from 1948-1964, and the Toronto Dominion Bank used the location while building the new bank at Mill and Arthur Streets.

8. The Royal Bank—6 Church Street West



Until 1976, when the Royal Bank moved into its new building here, the northwest corner was Elmira's hotel corner. In 1857, Henry Christman built a hotel here and operated the post office in the hotel from 1857 to 1863. In the 1890's, the hotel was known as the Anglo-American Hotel and was run by Henry Zilliax. Beside the Anglo-American stood another hotel known as the Union Hotel. This frame hotel was run by George Vogt who was also an organ builder.



Zilliax House, 1903 (later the Royal Hotel)

Ruins of Anglo-American Hotel after the 1898 fire

In 1898, fire razed both hotels and their outbuildings. Henry Zilliax immediately rebuilt on the corner a three-story brick hotel known as the Zilliax House. The building was rectangular with a flat roof and a small columned portico at its main entrance on Church St. In 1903, John Steddick, a hotelier from Floradale, took over and the hotel was renamed The Steddick. At this time it was one of three hotels in

town. By 1923, the Royal Bank occupied the lower level of the hotel which it finally bought in 1926. The hotel portion with an entrance on Arthur Street then became known as the Royal Hotel and operated under various lessees until the building was demolished in the 1970's.

9. 9, 11, 13 Church Street West



As you continue down Church Street West, notice that the stores on the left-hand side are part of one building. This building, known as Klinck's Block, was built in the 1880's (left photo). In 1903 it housed a seed store run by W. D. Ludwig, Klinck's Jewelry Store, and the Elmira Signet newspaper office (left to right in the photo). The Germania Society also met in rooms at the back of the block.

The building has been considerably altered over the years, but some of the original round-headed windows with their decorative keystone and label surround are still evident in the second story. Until the 1960's a balcony with a cast-iron railing extended over the shops.

10. 36, 38 Church Street West



36

38

As you move into the residential section, notice that in spite of some major alterations, these two adjacent buildings on the right-hand side are in the Ontario House style (The building at 34 was originally in this style as well.) This style is a brick or stone outgrowth of the 1-1/2 story log cabin, and was popular in Ontario from 1850 through the 1880's. One reason for its popularity was that the house provided almost as much sleeping space as a two-story house, but was taxed as a one-story house. The hallmark of the style is the central peaked gable with a window—usually a Gothic pointed-arch—to allow light into the sleeping space. The rear extensions of these houses would have been used as summer kitchens.

Turn left on Dunke Street.

11. 2 and 4 Dunke Street



2



4

The first two houses on the right-hand side were built by the Heimbecher family of the Heimbecher and Jung furniture company. No. 4 was built in the early 1900's (the front porch a later addition) by Casper Heimbecher, and No. 2 was built later by his son, who also worked in the business. Like many area residents of the time, the Heimbechers could almost see their place of business from their homes (at the site of the former LCBO).

12. 40, 42 Church Street West



40

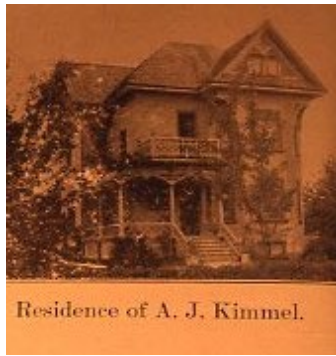


42

These Italianate houses were built around the 1890's and share the main characteristics of the Italianate house of the period. But the individual taste and means of each builder is reflected in the small or large variations on the Italianate theme. Both houses have the squarish shape, the low-pitched hip roof, the wide eaves with decorative bracketing, and the narrow round-headed windows characteristic of the style. The round windows in near the roof called bull's eye windows.

The design in the bracketing of each house also differs. These two also share a lozenge design incised in the frieze. No. 42 is more elegant, with its curved hood gable and symmetrical projective bays which add space and light.

13. 45 Church Street West



Although this house has been significantly altered with the removal of the ornate wrap-around veranda and the addition to the west side, the original elegance of the Queen Anne Revival house remains in the fancy gable trim and wide brackets beneath. This was the turn-of-the-20th-century home of August J. Kimmel, who organized the Elmira Felt Company in 1900 and donated the land for the present Elmira library. According to a citation in the Waterloo Hall of Fame, A. J. Kimmel was one of Waterloo County's leading industrialists. The house was designated a heritage building in 1989.

Backtrack on Church Street to Dunke Street North. Turn left and follow Dunke Street to William Street and turn right, stopping at No. 17.

14. 17 William Street



The square lines, low-pitched roof, narrow round-headed windows, and double two-story bays of front portion of this house are all features of the Italianate style.

This house was the home of M. H. Hemmerich who came to Elmira in 1886 as a blacksmith. He gave up blacksmithing in 1897 to become proprietor of the Elmira Laundry, which operated of the rear portion of his house.

15. 14 William Street



1980s



2024

This Queen Anne Revival style house was built sometime after 1903.

16. 4 and 6 William Street



No. 6, 1985



No. 6, 2024

These two Queen Anne Revival houses, very similar in some respects, were built around 1917. They share the basic Queen Anne characteristics, but have interesting distinctions in detail. The double square pillars and flat arches on the porch of No. 4 are in the Tuscan style (echoing the Tuscan detailing of the interior of the house), while those of No. 6 are Classical. No. 6 has more leaded windows than No. 4, but the leaded windows of No. 4 are bevelled. The upper porch of No. 6 has been closed in; it originally had the same fish-scale shingling as No. 4.

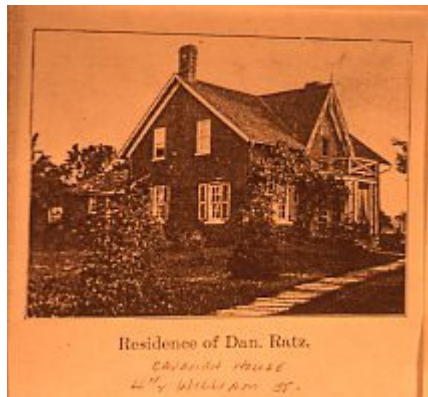


No. 4, 1985



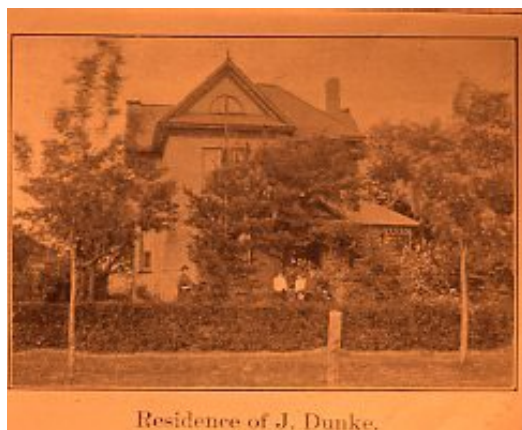
No. 4, 2024

17. 4-1/2 William Street



On an oddly-located lot behind Nos. 4 and 6 William Street was the Ontario-style house known as the Cavanagh farmhouse. The builder, William Cavanagh, was one of the earliest settlers in the township. He had a farm near Floradale before he moved to this location in 1874, when he built this house. He lived here until 1890, and at that time his farmland occupied all the William Street area from Arthur Street to Dunke Street.

18. 2 William Street



This elegant house, built around 1891, and known as the Dunke House, was designated a heritage property in 1984. The house is a fine example of the restrained Queen Anne Revival style popular in this area at the time. The irregular plan, steep hip roof, tall chimneys, broad porches (dating from about 1912), decorative brackets, and interesting variety of window shapes are all characteristic features. Note the lozenge windows above the door, an Art Deco feature. The showy balconies, turrets, and trim which often accompany this flamboyant style are lacking, however, in this house as in most Queen Anne houses in the area. Interesting interior features are the fine winding staircase in the entrance hall and an ornate cherrywood fireplace surround in the den.

This house has also been the home of three prominent members of the Elmira community. Jacob Dunke, who built the house, came to Elmira from Berlin (later, Kitchener) in 1864. He worked as a clerk in Isaac Wenger's general store and started his own general store on the northeast corner of Arthur and Church in 1875. The business was a success, and he retired at 43, having become one of the wealthiest men in Elmira. He was also Elmira's first treasurer from 1886 until his death in 1909.

Armand C. Kimmel bought the house in 1911. Brother of industrialist A. J. Kimmel who organized north Arthur Street in 1900, Armand managed Great West Felt Company was involved in several other of his brother's businesses. In 1916 Oscar H. Vogt bought the house. He was involved in several of Elmira's early businesses.

This heritage walking/wheeling tour was updated by members of the Woolwich Township Heritage Committee in Summer, 2024, from the compilation completed by Susan Bryant and Bertha Thompson in December, 1985. Additional work was done by Art Gorman in 1989. We thank Stacy Willingham, Archivist at the Waterloo Regional Archives, for her significant assistance.