



c.1982 Built Heritage Inventory

129 Aberdeen Road

This house on Aberdeen Road – where there is now a grey office building – has been home to several of Bridgewater’s more prominent citizens. The land was originally owned by famed Bridgewater barrister Fletcher B. Wade, and was part of the tract of land sold by him to the younger Davisons in the late 1880s. This particular parcel was acquired by E. D. Davison, Junior, son of lumber baron E. D. Davison, Senior, and the town’s first mayor, from 1899-1900. It was he who was responsible for acquiring Judge Mather Byles DesBrisay’s expansive collection of curios from his widow, Ada DesBrisay, for the benefit of the town’s citizens. E.D. was purported to have built a house on this location in the period from 1891-1895. He died in 1902, passing the land (and potentially a home) on to his son, Harold (also called “Bud”), though the present house has been dated via assessment records to have been built in 1905. Harold Davison owned the home from 1902 until 1919. He eventually left to run a manufacturing business in Ontario. However, the next two owners of the home were of equal or greater prominence: Robert McDormand and William Duff.

McDormand, originally from Annapolis County, was employed as a bookkeeper at E. D. Davison & Sons from 1892, when he first moved to Bridgewater at age 20, until 1915, when he started his own general lumber and insurance business, which he continued until 1934 when he became an Old Age Pension inspector. He is most

notable for serving as mayor from 1922-1923, as well as serving on council, being a longtime Chair of the Board of School Commissioners, and holding the Chairman's position of the Board of Management of Dawson Memorial Hospital from 1928 to 1933. He was very much active in the town's political life. He owned this house from 1919 until 1931, a period of great personal political involvement.

When McDormand sold the home in 1931, it was to William and Jennie Duff. William Duff, originally from Newfoundland, moved to Bridgewater in 1895 as a clerk in the store of John Levi "Jumbo" Oxner. He eventually married Jennie Oxner, John Levi's adoptive daughter, and eventually took over publishing Oxner's newspaper, the Bridgewater Enterprise. He later bought the Lunenburg Progress newspaper and merged it with the Enterprise, creating the Progress-Enterprise newspaper which is still published today. As receiver for a large fish company which had gone into liquidation in 1905, he combined many other companies with it, creating Atlantic Fish Companies, Limited, and five years later he amalgamated it with two other companies creating Robbins, Jones, and Whitman Company, a successful Lunenburg Enterprise. Other business initiatives undertaken by Duff included heading the LaHave Outfitting Company, the Lunenburg Marine Insurance Company, the Lunenburg Marine Railway, the Lunenburg & Riverport Transport Company, the Ideal Maternity Home, and Chester Basin Shipbuilder's, Limited.

Duff's first foray into politics included being appointed municipal Clerk and Treasurer in 1904, which he subsequently combined into a sole position. Though losing the 1911 election for the Provincial Legislature as a Liberal, he was appointed as the Federal standard bearer at a February, 1915 convention, and later became the Member of Parliament for the federal ridings of Lunenburg (1917-1925), Lunenburg-Queens (1925-1926), and, upon losing the 1926 election, for Antigonish-Guysborough via a by-election, from 1927 to 1936. That year, he was appointed to the Canadian Senate, representing the Lunenburg division, until his death in 1953. He also served as mayor of Lunenburg from 1916 until 1922, and was deputy speaker in the House of Commons in 1926. He and his wife owned the house for eleven years (1931-1942), during which he was active in federal politics on Bridgewater's behalf. In 1942 he sold it to the Cohen family, and as of 1985 it remained in the possession of their descendants.

Though the house, as of the c. 1982 photo, may not appear quite so lavish as to entail the desire of so many prominent members of Bridgewater society, it is clear that it was once quite opulent for its time. Built in a very late Gothic Revival style, it featured a very steeply peaked roof on both wings of its L-shape gabled structure, as well as a steeply peaked gable projection filling in the corner of the ell. The gabled projection added a bit of typical Victorian and Edwardian eclecticism to the house, incorporating Queen Anne Revival elements via the pediment-like nature alluded to with its long returning eaves, as well as with its atypical rounded second-storey window, a typical

Queen Anne Revival device. Rounded glass was much more expensive to cut and to fit into the frame of a house, so in the height of Queen Anne Revival architecture it was seen as an opulent decorative touch. Another interesting gable peak was added by the vent to the attic. The bottom projected slightly, and underneath the cornice contains dentils. Either side of the cornice had elaborate scrolled brackets. This suggests the vent was formerly a dormer, either a fancy pedimented dormer typical of Queen Anne homes, or one with a peaked Gothic window. As well, adding to the Gothic Revival character, the upstairs windows on the front-gabled wing of the house had broad, peaked hood moulding on top, a way of alluding to the peaked style common in Gothic Revival architecture. Also, at the roof level, there were signs of three chimneys, which even by 1902 standards would have been an extravagance. Though the one at the right was altered and the one in the background seemed plainer, the one at the left retained its superb brickwork and corbels. The entryway also added the flair of Gothic Revival while in keeping with the more contemporary Queen Anne trend; the peak over the doorway was common on large verandas of the era to designate the main entryway, though here the small peak and lack of a veranda seemed to have been more Gothic inspired. There was also quite a bit of intricate moulding and woodwork under the eaves.

The single storey ell at right is almost surely a more modern addition. The sun porch, given away by its modern, non-Craftsman, windows and irregular roof-joint over the entryway is almost surely a Cohen addition as well. The entryway itself was intriguing; sidelights and transom lights were not common in architectural elements beyond the 1920s, though they do not appear original. It is likely the entry porch was filled in, and they were created to mimic the sun porch and to fill in the gap. What was lovely about the entrance, however, was the curved stone sides to the short flight of steps leading to it, obviously an expensive addition. Given the owners of the home and their wealth - Duff is purported to have been a millionaire based off a secretive rum running business from St. Pierre and Miquelon to the United States - the treasures of the inside of the home can only be imagined.

From the *129 Aberdeen Road* Built Heritage File, and *William Duff, Robert McDormand, E. D. Davison Jr., and Davison Family* Biography files