

Carleton Street Properties: 81/83 and 89/91 Carleton Street, Almonte, Ontario

The two houses at the end of Carleton street on Coleman's island represent a significant part of Almonte's history. They were built in 1871 as tenement houses for workers in the adjacent Rosamond #1 mill. As such they are connected with the growth and decline of the textile industry that marked Almonte's golden age, and with the Rosamonds, Almonte's largest mill-owning family. In their structure and detailing, these homes are wonderful examples of local architecture. However, the frame buildings are in need of some maintenance to preserve what is largely original woodwork, windows, and siding.

These properties appear on Coleman's survey, town lots 66 and 65.

Architectural Features:

Dates: Built 1871

Style: These buildings are wood frame and built in a classical revival style.

Dimensions: The lot sizes are 64 by 90 feet, and the buildings are approximately 50 (frontage) by 45 feet, with the main building being 25 feet deep and the rear summer kitchen portion being 20 feet deep and 25 feet wide.

Architect: Unknown

Current Owners: George Yaremchuk and Gail Barr. These houses are currently rented and occupied by four families.

Construction: These are frame houses clad in horizontal wooden siding with stone foundations. The buildings are two-story duplexes. Their roofs are hip-and-gable with two dormers each on the street side and one larger dormer on the back of each. The roofs are covered with asphalt shingles. Each house has been divided into two identical halves following the symmetry of the building.

Single story summer kitchens were built at the back of each house at the time of original construction (they appear on Andrew Bell's 1872 map of the mill and its surroundings), and these have been somewhat modernized. However, they also have original features like a wood shed on the back of 81 which was accessible from the inside as well. 83 now has a back deck.

81/83 is painted white and chocolate brown, and 89/91 is painted cream and dark brown. These colours are presumably close to the original colours.

Openings: Most of the windows on these two properties are original to the 1871 construction date. They are mostly double hung, two over two panes. Some of the windows are narrower and have just a single pane above and below. Many of the storm/screen windows have been replaced but some are also original. At the front of 81/83 a large window has a top portion with a pane surrounded by twenty small panes. This is a newer addition but still interesting in its own right. However, it detracts from the sense that the houses belong together. The back portion (summer kitchen) of 81/83 has new vinyl windows. 89/91 has an original eight paned window at the back with two square 4 paned windows on either side.

The entrance doors are at either side and open into entrance porches built onto the side of the houses. The end porches (#81 and #91) are identical with a large eight-

paned window (4 over 4). The inside porches (#83 and #89) are also identical, having 3 (2over2) ribbon windows surrounded by vertical paneling. I believe that these entrance porches are a later addition as well. None of the exterior doors are original, they are now aluminum screen doors but original interior doors are visible within the small vestibules.

Notable Features: These homes display a graceful symmetry and a solidity of construction. The symmetry of their windows and gables, along with the fact that they are identical creates a graceful balance. Most of the trim, siding, windows and fence of both houses are original to the 1871 construction of these houses. Careful craftsmanship and attention to detail is evident in the exterior doorframes, the brackets under the eaves, and the cornices over the windows at the front of the house. Another notable feature is the fact that these were built as quality workers' houses which distinguishes them from any other (extant) in Almonte. It is also to be noted that these properties back onto the river and face what is now Mill Fall Condominiums (Rosamond Mill). Most of the exterior of these buildings needs maintenance and paint to return them to their former appearance.

History

These properties are linked to the history of textiles in Almonte. They were a part of the Rosamond Woolen Company's vast #1 mill complex. They were conceived as tenement houses and were labeled as such in Andrew Bell's 1872 map of Almonte (See fig 3). However, these houses are not like the typical poor tenements found all over England in the 19th century. They were built to provide housing for chosen employees of the Rosamond Company.

The Rosamonds were the biggest woolen mill family in Almonte. James Rosamond built his first mill here in 1856 (Victoria Woolen Mill). He passed the company on to his sons Bennett and William who planned and built a new and larger mill. They built what soon became known as the #1 Mill on Coleman's Island 1866/7. In 1872 they finished constructing a warehouse (which is now part of the MVTM) and counting house and a dye house. At that point their mill was the largest and most advanced woolen mill in Canada. The tenement houses were built in 1871 as a part of that expansion. It is interesting to note that Almonte became an incorporated village in 1870. Around that time, the textile industry was at its peak. The Almonte Gazette was reporting weekly on new mills opening, new businesses, and all sorts of construction activity.

According to the North Lanark Historical Society in their booklet The development of the woollen industry in Lanark, Renfrew and Carleton Counties, the Rosamonds were excellent employers. They were fair and even took their employees on excursions. They cite the fact that they built company housing as testament to their fairness as employers which indicates that other mill owners and operators may not have done the same. Richard Reid notes in his The Rosamond Woolen Company of Almonte, that "in 1867 the Rosamond mills alone employed one in seven of all persons in Almonte." Therefore the mill and its surroundings formed an essential part of the growing town.

According to a current tenant, these buildings continued to function as housing for Rosamond employees for quite some time. Tax assessment rolls of 1882 apparently show Ballantyne in 89/91 and Healey and Smith in 81/83 as tenants (Report by

Barbara Ross, 1978). It would be interesting to do a detailed research project on the tenants of these properties. From the Registry Office abstracts one can see that the properties were transferred as chattels to the Zephyr Textiles Co. in 1975. Until that time they were owned by the Rosamond Woolen Co and presumably used to house employees. In 1978 the properties were purchased by Robert Rivington and his wife and so became privately owned and rented at that time. Currently they are owned by Yaremchuk and Barr.

Construction History and Current Building

These properties have remained remarkably intact but some changes have been made as mentioned above. 81/83 is better kept with less deterioration to the woodwork. A few of the other alterations and repairs are outlined below.

According to a tenant, these buildings originally housed just one family each; that of an overseer or manager at the mill. They were subsequently divided into four dwellings. Apparently the outline of the archway connecting the two halves of the building (now blocked up) is visible in 81/83.

The foundation was redone within the last few years using the existing stones. During this project a dated cornerstone was found (1871) and replaced within the foundation of #81.

Many of the original interior features are intact including the narrow board tongue and groove pine floors and much of the trim and baseboards, but many alterations have also been done inside. A renovation in one of the upstairs rooms revealed lathe and plaster in the walls without insulation. Newspapers were also found at this time. A more detailed investigation of those findings would also be interesting.

After purchasing the properties in the late 70s, Mr. Rivington applied to the town council to have telephone and electrical wires rerouted to the back of the buildings as a part of an overall effort to rejuvenate the properties in keeping with their heritage character. It appears he did some of the proposed changes but did not maintain the buildings

A report done in 1978 by Barbara Ross for the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee lists the condition of the “cosmetics” as poor but repairable. she notes that chimneys sit side by side on the gable ridge, which have since been removed.

At that time the buildings were still alone on the street, as they were when they were first built (see figs 1 and 2). Ross describes the idyllic setting at length. Today houses have been built on either side of these properties, completely ruining that effect.

Images

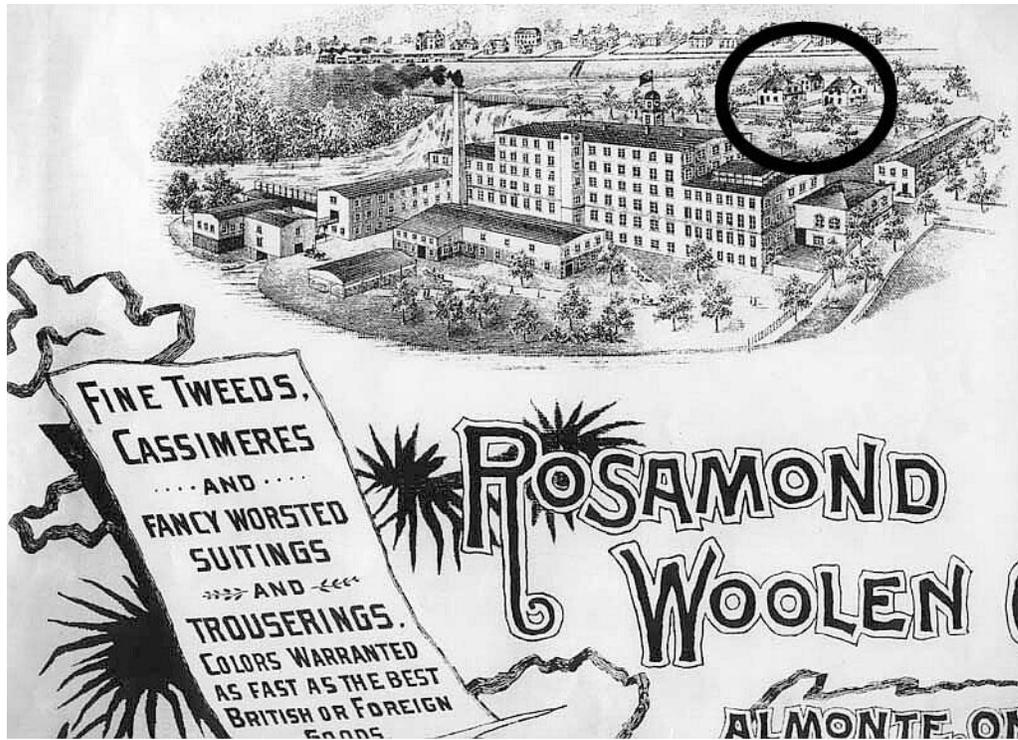


Fig. 1. Taken from www.almonte.com. This advertisement shows the buildings (in circle) across Carleton street from the mill.

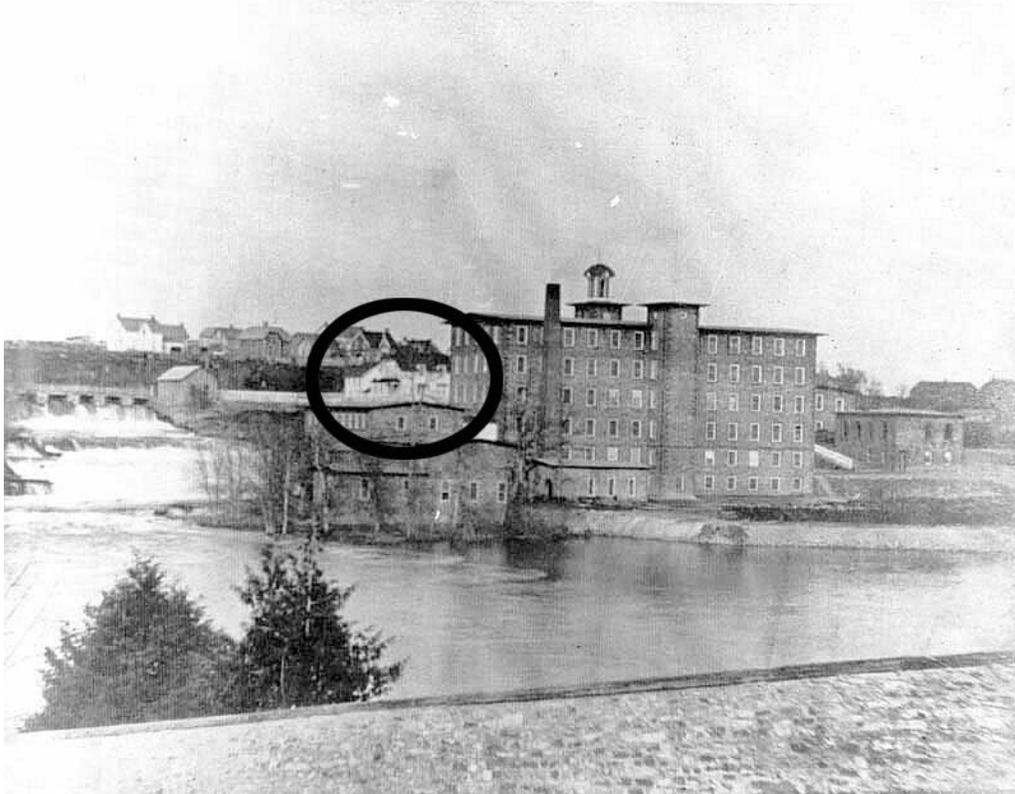
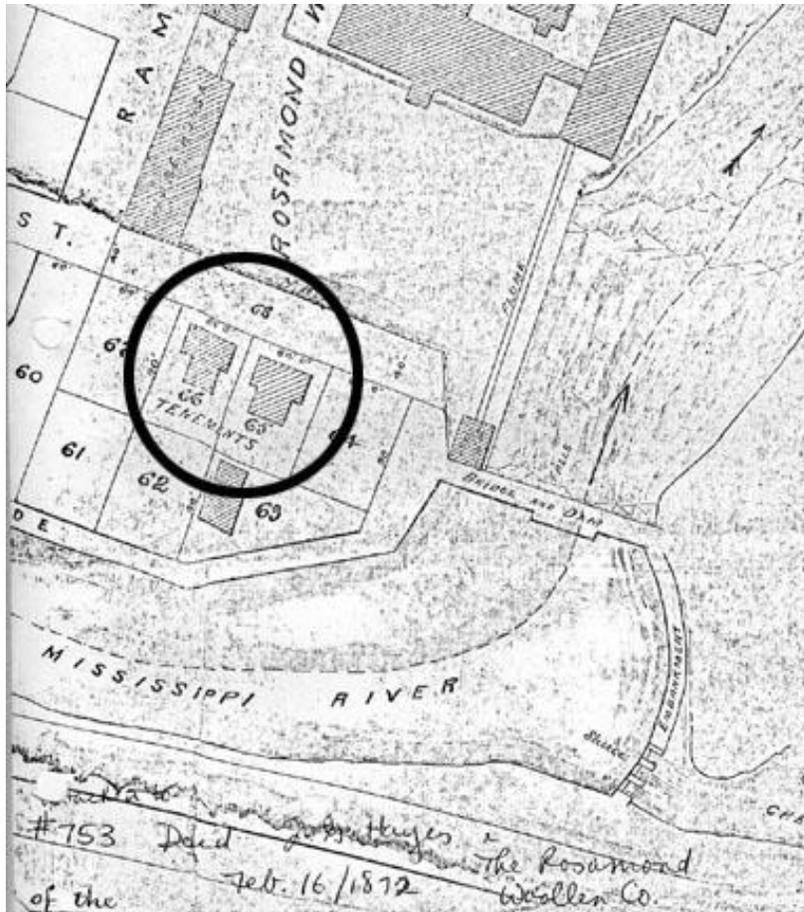


Fig. 2. Taken from www.almonte.com. 89/91 is visible. Late 1880's- note the water tower is not here yet.



A portion of Andrew Bell's map of Almonte, 1872 showing the tenements.

Sources:

- Almonte Gazette 1869-71
- North Lanark Historical Society, The development of the woollen industry in Lanark, Renfrew and Carleton Counties: a project of the North Lanark Historical Society, 1978.
- John Leaning and Lyette Fortin, Our Architectural Ancestry, Ottawa.
- Gerry Wheatley Rosamond designated a National Heritage-Site, Almonte Gazette, December 30, 1986.
- www.almonte.com accessed February, 2008.
- Barbara Ross, Rosamond Mill-Worker's Homes, compiled for the Almonte Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, June 9, 1978.

- Letter from R.H.P. Marshall (chairman of the Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee) to R.J. France (town clerk) regarding Mr. Rivington's application to town council, June 9, 1978.
- Richard Reid, The Rosamond Woolen Company Of Almonte: Industrial Development in a Rural Setting, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, September, 1983.
- Conversation with Stan Hall, resident of 81 Carleton, February, 2008.
- See http://almonte.clal.ca/images/pictures/parks_canada/disc_1/fi27.jpg for a map drawn as part of a Parks Canada assessment of the property prior to the 1987 conversion of the mill into condos.

Compiled by Linda Hamilton, February 2008