

Preliminary Study of the Heritage Character of the Mount Nemo Plateau

Executive Summary

The nature and objectives of this assignment were to undertake a study of the heritage character of the Mount Nemo Plateau attempting, firstly, to determine whether the area possessed ‘heritage character’, and, if so, the nature and extent of the cultural resources found to contribute to that character. Assuming that the Plateau was found to possess ‘heritage character’ the second objective involved formulating a ‘A Statement of Heritage Character/Cultural Value’ to succinctly describe it and to consider the tools whereby its unique sense of place could be preserved. As this is a preliminary study, the assignment also includes the recommendation of potential further studies toward the conservation of the heritage place and its heritage assets.

The Study Area, with boundaries of Britannia Road to the north, Dundas Street to the south, Walker’s Line to the east and the municipal boundary to the west, was intended to encompass the full Plateau as well as important views of the escarpment from the east and north. The Study methodology combined the review of background documents, examination of the area ‘in the field’ and meetings with municipal staff and the municipal heritage committee.

A landmark of the Burlington area the Plateau is not only important for its geological, ecological and scenic values but, as this Study came to show, also for its cultural heritage values. Research into the evolution of settlement on the Plateau established the key historic themes of the area. Fieldwork, done with reference to the City’s inventory of heritage properties, confirmed the extent of surviving cultural resources and led to the confirmation of the area as a **Cultural Heritage Landscape (CHL)**. The rationale for this was ‘summarized’ in the following Statement of Heritage Character:

The Mount Nemo Plateau combines important natural and cultural features within a distinct boundary established essentially by the escarpment topography but broadened to include the roads along its perimeter that provide access and views to the cuesta. Already recognized for its environmental value and sensitivity including: the escarpment forest with its ancient cedars; the rarity of species such as the Jefferson Salamander; and as the headwaters for Grindstone Creek, it also includes historic farmsteads some with origins that predate the mid 19th century and many of which are still actively engaged in agriculture.

The basic mosaic of lot fabric eloquently speaks to the imposition of two different forms of land survey - the 1806 single front system and the 1819 double front system on the irregular escarpment landscape. These lot forms themselves ‘commemorate’ the two purchases of Mississauga lands from which Nelson Township was formed. A relatively high percentage of 19th century farm residences are still extant, representing a range of vernacular architectural styles but most notably the three bay, 1 ½ storey center gable – Ontario cottage style constructed in the local dolostone. Many of the homes of pioneer

settlers whose families were the backbone of the local community - such as Colling, Featherstone and Coulson – still survive. Key landmarks of the historical community remain including the Lowville United Church and the Lowville Cemetery both intimately connected with the Colling family, the former as being built on land deeded for the construction of a brick Wesleyan church by Joseph Colling, and the latter being where the Colling family is interred.

The area was virtually completely agrarian up until WWII with wheat farming eventually giving way by the last quarter of the 19th century to a mixed farming approach which included orchards, livestock and market gardens with an emphasis on fruit production and this remained the nature of farming on the Plateau. Farming continues to be the major land use on the Plateau and many farmsteads retain the traditional layout – access along a treed land, barn complex to the rear of the house with woodlot beyond and fields and orchards up to the road.

Traditionally considered an area for outdoor pursuits it contains a scenic component of Ontario's premier hiking path, the Bruce Trail.

The area offers many scenic (and traditional) views both to and from the Plateau. These include: views from Guelph Line and Cedar Springs Road toward the lake; views from Walker's Line and Britannia Road to the escarpment; and, most dramatically, the views from the escarpment edge at Mount Nemo Conservation Area which extend across the Peel Plain as far as Toronto.

The integration of natural, cultural and scenic values coupled with the perpetuation of the historic land use – farming – makes the Mount Nemo Plateau a special place.

The Study Area Boundary, revised during the course of the study to include Walker's Line, has been confirmed as the potential CHL boundary and would be stated as the area encompassed by Dundas Street to the south, Walker's Line to the east, Britannia Road to the north and the western municipal boundary to the west.

As a unique place, worthy of conservation, it was recommended that the reasonable next step would be to undertake a Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study of the area, that being the most comprehensive tool available in Ontario for the conservation of larger areas combining different properties with a wide range of cultural and natural attributes.