

Heritage Value

The heritage value of 680 Main Street lies in its architectural representation of Mahone Bay's prosperous shipbuilding era; its historic association with the working waterfront; and, its association with the Ernst family of shipbuilders and merchants.

Its imposing scale, Victorian embellishments and site near the government wharf on the main road to Lunenburg make 680 Main Street an architectural landmark in Mahone Bay. The cheerful mix of Neo-classical, Italianate and Bracketted details captures attention and reflects the flourishing local economy at the time it was built. Also significant is its relationship to the small Neo-classical cottage next door. Together they represent a continuum of life from the frugal settlement days to the prosperous shipbuilding years on the Mahone Bay waterfront.

The home at 680 Main Street is believed to have been built in the mid-1880s by Abraham Ernst (1849-1911). His father, Jacob Ernst, already owned the shore and wharves directly opposite when Abraham acquired this property in 1883. The wharves were the site of Jacob Ernst's import/export business which grew alongside the Ernsts' thriving shipyard. These businesses were passed to Abraham and then to his sons, Selwyn and Willis, and prospered for several generations. Ernst family descendants recall that medical missionary Sir William Grenfell regularly provisioned his northern Newfoundland expeditions at the Ernst family stores and wharves. A little further along the shore to the southeast, at the foot of Fauxburg Road, the two slipways of the Ernst Shipbuilding Company launched ships for the fishery and the Second World War.

Character-Defining Elements

Character-defining elements of 680 Main Street relate to its Italianate architecture and original features and include the following:

- Italianate features such as the three-arch entry, two-arch central second-floor window and central five-sided Scottish dormer
- Corner pilasters with paired brackets at cornices
- Brackets under eaves
- Two-over-two windows with heavily carved hoods, fretwork and moldings
- Wood cladding with frieze boards under eaves and water boards at base of cladding
- Cut granite curbs edging the front lawn and driveway
- Large, imposing scale especially in relationship to the older smaller neighbouring house
- Original and historic interior features including fireplaces, cistern and hand pump, secondary stairway, spacious central halls, wide central staircase and handrail, and custom shutters