

103 Queen Street, Almonte “The Doctor's House”

The stone house on Queen Street known as the Doctor's House has indeed been owned and occupied by doctors for its entire existence. It was built between 1868 and 1869 by Dr. Mostyn, a prominent and renowned Almonte physician. The house therefore represents architecture at the peak of Almonte's textile industry boom. Its solid, excellent craftsmanship and well proportioned detailing make it one of Almonte's most notable homes. Amazingly, the house has been largely untouched and remains almost exactly as it looked when it was built.

This property appears on the Henderson Survey, lot 1 Queen Street.

Architectural Features

Dates: Built 1868/9

Style: Italianate, built in the style of an Irish country manor.

Dimensions: Unknown

Architect: Unknown, conceived by Dr William Mostyn.

Current Owners: Dr. F A Murphy

Construction: This house is constructed of local limestone which was possibly quarried on site. It was built with timber framework clad in stone. The basement is reputedly 9 feet tall and both the living stories are full as well. There is a one and a half story office (same construction date) to the rear. This office is actually at 3 Clyde Street. A two car garage, constructed of wood, is attached to the office portion; this garage is not considered part of the heritage value of the property. Originally there was also a summer kitchen, stable and gardens at this end of the property. The house is covered by a hipped roof with large overhanging eaves supported by carved wooden brackets. The trim is painted white with a green door leading from the portico into the house and gray on the floor of the portico. The roof is green painted tin. [*The following details of the interior are from Tales From The Doctor's House (1995) by John Patrick Dunn.*] The interior has oak floors downstairs with oak doors in a dark varnish. The windows were trimmed in ash. Stairs sweep from the lower floor to the upper landing. There are two chimneys in the main house which connected four fireplaces (two upstairs and two downstairs). The dining room fireplace had marble surrounding it. The rear portion of the house (office) also has a chimney for a stove and a fireplace. It contained a pantry and scullery in addition to offices and living quarters upstairs. This rear office part of the house was built much more simply with pine windows and a plain staircase.

Openings: The windows and doors are original to the house. All have stone lintels and stools. The windows in the upper floor are arched while those below are flat. They are remarkably tall, showing off the height of the two full stories. Most are double hung sashes with a few variations such as tall narrow 4/4 windows and narrow arched 8 pane window. The windows include what appear to be original outer storm windows. The front door is protected by a portico with double doors with and a light above them surrounded by a border of small square lights (see Fig. 1). Inside the covered portico a single door leads into the house. In the rear part of the house, a street door opens into the office. This office portion of the house has smaller windows in its upper story.

Notable Features: The house is largely original with little or no additions and updates beside wiring and plumbing. The architecture is balanced and solid, giving the house a timeless appeal. This house creates a beautiful reminder of what the area looked like a century ago along with St. Paul's Anglican Church, the Registry Office, Menzies House, and what is now the Hugessen house. The local limestone construction is also a notable feature.

Surroundings: This house still sits on its original large building lot. It is surrounded by tall cedar hedges and some beautiful mature trees including oak and blue spruce. Foundation plantings along the side of the house are in keeping with the proportion of the hedges, although not strictly historically accurate. A fenced pool has been added by the current owners at the back of the house.

History:

This house has a long and unique history in Almonte. It has been lived in exclusively by doctors and was already known as “The Doctor's House” in the early part of the 20th century. The house was built in 1868/9 by Dr. William Mostyn in what was then known as Irishtown on the North side of the Mississippi. Dr. Mostyn chose the location because of its proximity to Reilly's Hotel and Hall (across the street), the river, and other professional men (such as Judge Jamieson) nearby.

Dr. William Mostyn was an extremely active member of the local community and his home is evidence of his prominence in town. He was born in Ireland (County Roscommon) in 1836 and his family emigrated to Kingston when he was an infant. He went to Kingston Grammar School and then attended Queen's College and received his degree of doctor of medicine in 1858. That same year he began his practice in Almonte. In 1867 quarrying began on his new home and office. At Christmas 1869 he moved in with his sister Sara and a housekeeper. Aside from his general practice, he was a surgeon of the 42nd battalion of the volunteer infantry, he represented Rideau and Bathurst division in the Ontario medical council from 1869 to 1872, he was the first Reeve of the new town of Almonte, (1871) and was a trustee of the school board for 17 years. He was also president of the North Lanark Agricultural Society, and was prominent with the freemasons, acting at one time as the deputy district grand master for the Ottawa district in the grand lodge of Canada. Dr. Mostyn was also the North Lanark MLA (provincial parliament) from 1875-9. He was a prominent citizen and was often a witness at weddings in the area. Dr. Mostyn drowned in March 1881 in a tragic accident on the Mississippi River near Appleton. He did not leave children or a wife. Please see the attached file entitled **Mostyn[1].doc** for more information and images.

After Dr. Mostyn's death, his practice was taken over by Dr. D P Lynch. When Dr. Lynch passed away in 1910, the parish priest of St Mary's, (the adjacent church to the house) Father J T Mac Nally, wrote to the young Dr John Francis Dunn in Montreal to point out the vacancy. Dr Dunn, also of Irish descent, came to Almonte and bought the house and practice for \$3000. The house came with furnishings and servants. He married a local woman, Mary Helen Moynihan in 1917. Together they had 13 children and raised them in the Doctor's House. Dr Dunn became a firm member of the “triumverate” of doctors (with Metcalfe and Kelley) practicing in Almonte at the time. They are immortalized now in a mural affixed to the side of The Hub. Dr. Dunn was a loving and compassionate doctor who went out of his way for his patients. He is still fondly remembered in the community today. He passed away in May 1961. One of his sons, local historian John Patrick Dunn, wrote about his memories growing up in the house in his book Tales From The Doctor's House (1995). His son in turn, Michael Dunn, continues to research and share local history (see www.almonte.com).

The house is now owned by Dr Murphy who also practices medicine in the adjoining office.

Photos taken July 2008
Figure 1





