

Architecture



JOHN BLUMENSON FILE PHOTO

King's Castle, Oakville as it looks today. Successive owners over the past 150 years made numerous changes, each tailored to their particular requirements and desires.

Should we restore heritage home or keep record of change?

No ready-made answer

Two different approaches here

Toronto Styles

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The decision whether to restore a missing architectural feature or to preserve an existing element is a dilemma faced by many owners of historical homes.

Unfortunately, there is no ready-made answer, since there are many factors to be considered.

For instance, should a feature such as a recent porch be removed in favour of one that would be more in character with the original style of the house? Or should such a later alteration be preserved for its own value and contribution to history?

There are other issues to be resolved as well. They include whether there is architectural or historical evidence for a missing feature, and does a later alteration have greater value than the older part of the house?

Here are two examples providing two different approaches to resolving this dilemma.

The first, William Mackenzie King's Castle in Oakville, illustrates a restoration approach. The second, the Ashbridge Estate in Toronto, presents a preservation approach.

In response to my article about King's Castle just over a year ago in *New in Homes*, a reader sent in a photo showing the house as it stood in 1928. An unadorned veranda stretches across and around one corner of the three-gabled Gothic Revival house.

Today, there is no veranda across the front of the house. Tremaine's 1858 Map of Halton County, however, illustrates a highly decorated veranda on the front of the house.

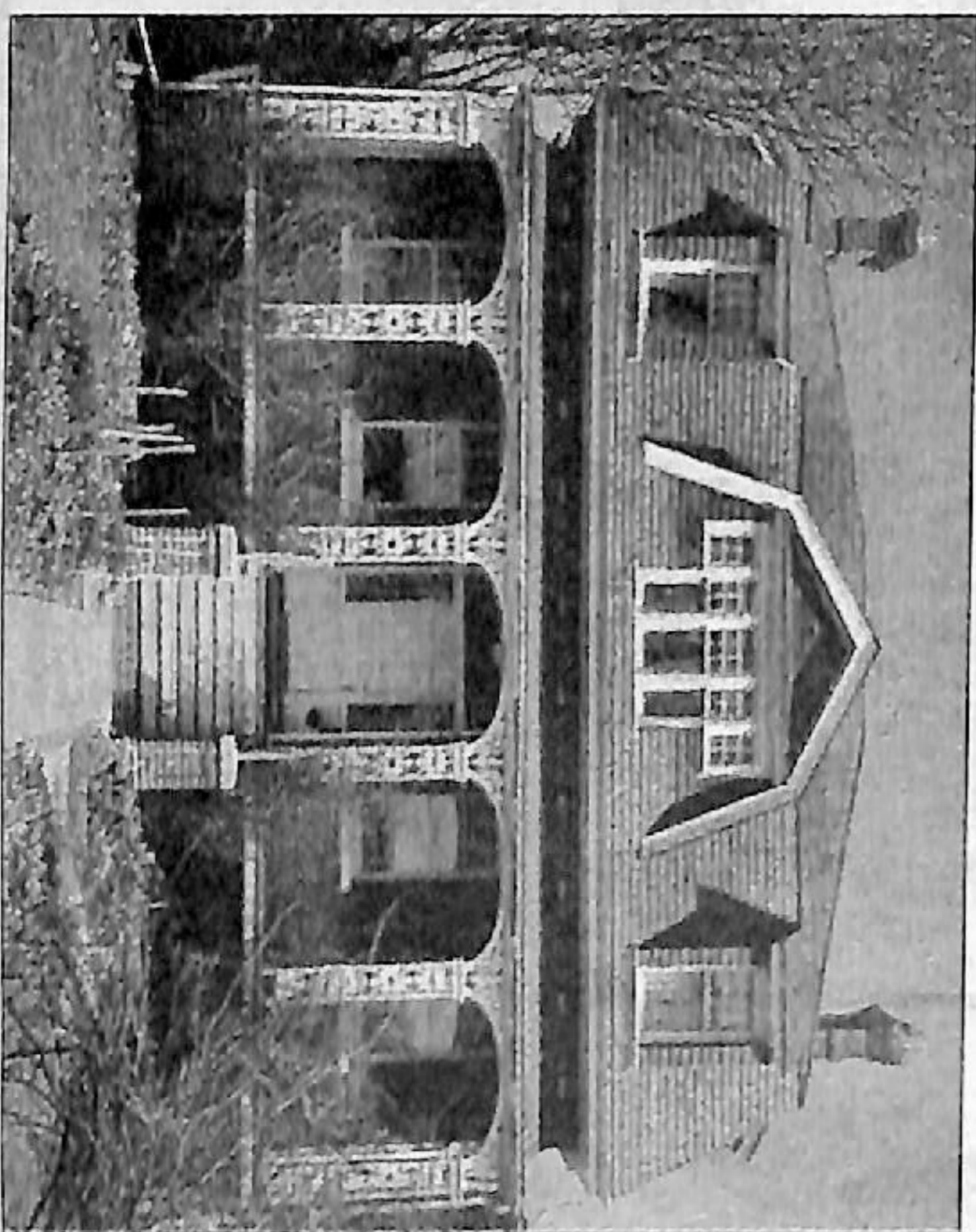


A reader sent in this photo of King's Castle as it looked in 1928. An unadorned veranda stretches across and around one corner of the house.

to family. The eclectic combination of a 1910 gambrel roof on top of the earlier one-storey 1830 Georgian Style cottage detracts from the stylistic integrity of the whole.

To remove the early 20th century alteration with a restored Georgian style roof, however, would have resulted in eliminating a major portion of the family's contribution to the history of the property.

The Foundation preferred to preserve all the parts and features of the house as the best way to interpret the long-term history of the



TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

The Ontario Heritage Foundation opted to retain a gambrel roof added to a one-storey 1830s cottage to reflect the history and legacy of the owners, the Ashbridge family.

Intending to restore the house to its mid-19th century Gothic revival style, owners 100 years later believed the plain veranda to be "out of character" and removed it. From a practical perspective, this allowed sunlight to penetrate directly into the main parlour. Unfortunately, it is possible that portions of the demolished veranda may have been original. They could have been reused if the plain veranda had been retained until the owners were prepared to recreate the original look.

In contrast, the Ontario Heritage Foundation opted for a preservation approach when they acquired the Ashbridge Estate, to reflect the lengthy history of the Toron-

Ashbridge family. Preservation of architecture was the appropriate approach for the Ontario Heritage Foundation where accurate historical interpretation of one family's history is important.

In the case of King's Castle, successive owners over the past 150 years made numerous changes, each tailored to their particular requirements and desires.

Toronto Styles looks at architectural styles in older houses around the city; many of the same styles are reflected in today's new homes. John Blumenson is a Toronto architectural historian. He can be reached by e-mail at jblumenson@symptatico.ca