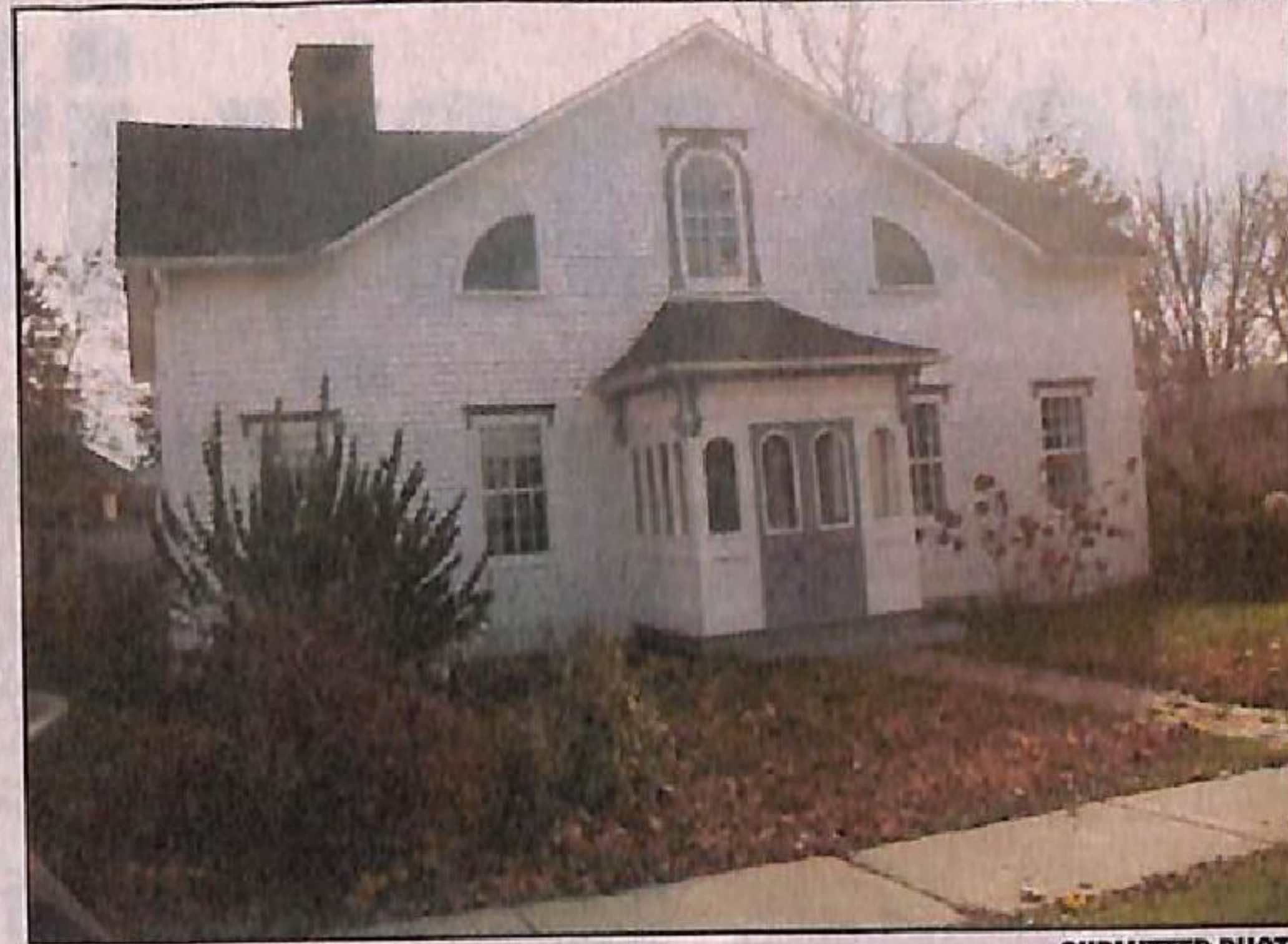


SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Keeler House, 9 Church St. East



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The Thornton House, 3 King St. West



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The Cumming House, 7 King St. West

Distinguished Colborne homes are connected

Historic properties abound in Northumberland County's Cramahe Township. Colborne, its main centre and home to 2,000 people, was once called Keeler's Creek after its founder, Joseph Abbott Keeler who owned a dry goods store in the village in 1819. It was renamed Colborne in 1829.

Of particular interest are three gems in the village built on land given by the Crown as early as 1809. Featured here are the Keeler, Thornton and Cumming Houses - all stately in their own right but also connected in ways you would expect in small-town Ontario.

We begin naturally with the founder's home at 9 Church St. East, built about 1820 after land that was purchased in 1812. Keeler House is Neo-Classical in design and became a National Historic Site in 1959. Currently owned by Jane and Tony Urquhart, Keeler House is an exact twin to Barnum House in Grafton, also a National Historic Site and likely built by the same architect. Joseph Keeler died here in 1839 at age 77 years. Jane Urquhart mentioned in conversation that the interior of Keeler House changed a great deal, in part because



it was a boarding house for many years before her parents bought it in the 1960s. However, where many interior details have been altered, the ornate woodwork in the parlor remains.

Tony, who is an abstractionist painter with a highly successful career, received the Order of Canada in 1995. Jane, a renowned author, was awarded the Officer of the Order of Canada in 2005 and was a finalist for the Giller Prize in 2001 for her book, *The Stone Carvers*. She was also a contender for Sanctuary Line in 2010 and has been a juror for the prestigious Canadian literary award.

You can't miss Thornton House at 3 King St. West when you enter Colborne either by Highway 401 or County Road 2. Its design is unique in keeping with the American-influenced Federal and Adams styles while being restrained in the United Empire Loyalist (UEL) tradition. The stark white clapboard home sports a

cross-gabled roof with original 12 over 12 pane windows and unique quarter-moon fans on either side of an impressive upper Palladian gable window. The handsome winter closet was added in later years. Its immediate neighbour to the left was a hardware store owned by the Keeler family. In 1927, the Scougale family and their descendants, of whom we will hear more, ran the Scougale Brothers Ladies' Clothing Store in the same location.

The original house, which is possibly different from the current one, was owned by John and Mary Steele in 1831 on land granted UEL John Ogden by 1809. John Steele emigrated from Scotland in 1820 to Colborne via Montreal where he became a merchant partner with founder Joseph Keeler.

P.B. Thornton was the Presbyterian minister in the village from 1908 to 1913 and so the house is named after him, but the current owners' files indicate that the Scougale family had a bigger claim to the name than the Thorntons. In 2007, Gordon Thornton Gemmell researched the land registry office in Cobourg and found that the owner in 1858 was a James Scougale.

P.B. Thornton was sent by the United Church of Canada to missions in China, Japan and India after 1931 and on his return married Marion (Scougale) Robson in 1937. Thornton died in 1945 in the house, but Robson lived in it until 1950 at which point her daughter became the owner, living there until 1959. Gemmell argued that because the Scougale family owned it for over a hundred years, they should rightly lay claim to the distinction.

Pride of ownership shows as Jirina Marton showed me the original back-to-back fireplaces formed by an eight-foot square chimney. The larger recess was for cooking and still retains a 'priest's hole' beside it and several other hiding places reminiscent of Elizabethan England when practicing Catholics could be imprisoned or executed. The original pine surround and accompanying wainscoting are intact. The centre hall plan with the original back staircase, now enclosed, leads to the second floor with unusually high ceilings. In 2012 the owners co-operated with the Heritage Cramahe Committee to produce a full report and had it designated in the Cramahe Cultural Heritage

Property Register in 2013.

The third distinguished property is a brick Georgian-style Ontario Cottage, popular from 1720 to 1840 in Upper Canada. It sits beside the Thornton House at 7 King St. West and was part of the original holdings of the Steele family. Known as the Cumming Residence, it was named after Cuthbert Cumming, a retired Hudson's Bay trader, and his wife Jane who lived there in 1845. Barry F. King wrote of Cumming's journal of "his concerns for the fur trade, the vanishing buffalo and the resulting famine to the natives." An early 1892 photo, compliments of the Cramahe Township Public Library, shows a winter closet over the front door and a simple railing around the perimeter. Pictured in the photo are a number of Cumming family members, including Circuit Judge Jay Ketchum and his wife. A later 1921 photo features a raised verandah walkway across the front and west side with a set of steps to the back lawn and an imposing picket fence with entry pillars. Shutters are shown in both photos.

Cumming House was showcased in *Century Home Renew* magazine in November 1987

and is presently owned by Mary Ryback and Gayle and Gerald Burgers.

Besides this triad of well-bred homes, other notables in Colborne are Seaton House (c.1830) of Italianate Victorian design, bought by John Bennett Marks in 1866. Seaton had been Master of Arms in the War of 1812-14. And then there's the old St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, built in 1830 on land donated by, who else but Joseph Abbot Keeler. Also prominent is the Colborne United Church which had originally been a Wesleyan Methodist Church and first built in 1823 before the more recent one in 1862. The ever-present town square was set out as early as 1815 and renamed Victoria Square in 1871.

Take a pre-Christmas drive to Colborne and see these fine edifices. (With appreciation from the homeowners, the Cramahe Township Public Library Archives and the Colborne and the Heritage Cramahe Committee).

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