

Statement of Significance



20 Gower Street

Formal Recognition Type

City of St. John's Heritage Building, Structure, Land or Area

Description of Historic Place

20 Gower Street is the eastern side of a semi-detached, Second Empire home located on Gower Street, one of downtown St. John's oldest streets. This wooden house has original two storey bay windows and peaked dormers projecting from the Mansard roof. The designation is confined to the footprint of the semi-detached building.

Heritage Value

20 Gower Street is significant for its aesthetic and historic values.

20 Gower Street is aesthetically valuable as it is a fine example of a Second Empire row house style in downtown St. John's. This architectural style, made popular in St. John's by John T. Southcott after the devastating Great Fire of 1892, employs many features found on this house. Gower Street was in the direct path of this fire which destroyed much of the city, and the house signifies the renewal and rebirth of St. John's after 1892, particularly as it relates to the merchant class style homes. Second Empire attributes include the Mansard roof which is pierced by peaked dormers, one with a double window, and one with a single window. The two-storey bay windows add dimension and depth through the use of stained glass, fascia boards and wooden shingles. The main door has two segmented side lights and a transom while the open, covered porch has a low pitch pedimented roof supported by brackets. It is sheathed in narrow wooden clapboard with wide corner boards and wide window mouldings and a moulded stringcourse runs under the eaves. This house has a similar exterior to its attached duplex, 022 Gower Street.

20 Gower Street is valuable for its historic associations with William H. Whiteley (1834-1903). Whiteley was a fisherman, merchant, inventor and politician. Whiteley established an extensive fishing business at Bonne-Esperance, a small island of Quebec, and employed around 50 people in the cod, salmon, herring and seal business. He was also responsible for having invented the

cod trap, a large box-like apparatus with netting and an opening into which the cod are directed by a long net extending to the shore. Whiteley's invention became immensely successful and improved overall productivity of the cod fishery. Whiteley was a long term leasee of 20 Gower Street, and several members of his large family lived in this and the surrounding duplexes for many years. William Whiteley Jr. was the occupier of 20 Gower Street from circa 1909 to 1915, and an E. Whiteley occupied the home from circa 1918 to 1931 and it remained part of the Estate of J. Whiteley until circa 1955.

Source: Designated at a regular meeting of the St. John's Municipal council held April 25, 2006, minutes SJMC2006-04-25/252R.

Character Defining Elements

All those elements that define the 19th century Second Empire style of row housing, including:

- Mansard roof;
- peaked dormers;
- two storey bay windows with fascia boards;
- stained glass windows;
- moulded stringcourse below eavesline;
- narrow wooden clapboard and wooden shingles on bay windows;
- pedimented porticoes supported by brackets;
- segmented side lights and transoms;
- wide window trim and cornerboards;
- 1/1 windows;
- all window and door openings; and
- location, orientation, massing and dimensions.

Location and History

Community	St. John's
Municipality	City of St. John's
Civic Address	020 Gower Street
Construction (circa)	1893 - 1893
Style	Second Empire
Building Plan	Irregular
Website Link	http://www.bonneesperancehouse.ca/