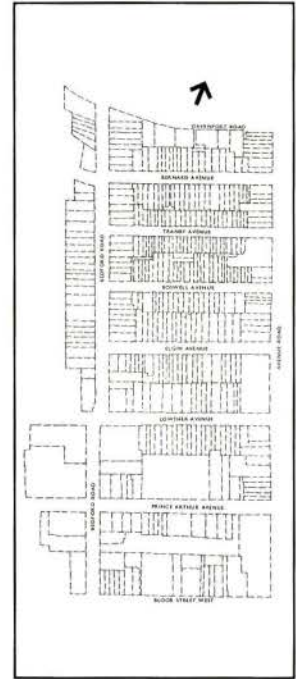


Change and Control in the East Annex, Toronto, 1853-1993



The Annex, a central residential area, is Toronto's closest equivalent to the British Arts-and-Crafts 'aesthetic' Queen Anne suburbs of London. Around 1900, the area bounded by Bedford Road, Bloor Street, Avenue Road, and Davenport Road became a popular place for a segment of Toronto's social aristocracy, and these residents established powerful groups to preserve the area's status quo for nearly 40 years.

After the development of the Annex in the 1880s, its eastern edge, which was originally a suburb of Yorkville, became a filter for the migration of successive waves of fashion and influence. West Yorkville became associated with this somewhat higher status neighbourhood, which is now considered the *East Annex* for planning purposes (figures 1, 2). It comprises six avenues running east-west: Prince Arthur, Elgin, Lowther, Boswell, Tranby, and Bernard. Bedford Road divides the two distinct areas of the Annex and East Annex.

Houses in elite urban fringe zones are typically taken over by institutions as the city core grows. This has occurred on specific streets in the Annex, but this enclave has remained predominantly

residential. The Annex is one of the few historic parts of Toronto where even moderately subtle social and religious control, through zoning and limits on development, can be seen at work. The survival of the East Annex can be attributed to four factors: the origins of its development; the comparatively small size of most of the houses and lots; the area's rapid assimilation into the urban centre; and Toronto's tradition of community activism.

Redevelopment pressures currently threaten the East Annex's residential land use and architectural character. Existing residential zoning allows 1.0-times coverage, whereas most historic buildings in the area cover between 0.6 and 0.8 of their lot. As a result, some houses have been demolished or gutted to build slightly larger replacements. In a study recently completed for the City of Toronto,¹ we examined possible zoning and design parameters to manage change without losing the area's character. Our research revealed that the evidence of various development forces is still visible on the ground, and that the East Annex is an uncommonly intact example of urban evolution.

Figure 1 (left). Bernard Avenue in the East Annex. (A.M. de Fort-Menares, 1992)

Figure 2 (above). Location of the study area, northwest of Bloor Street and Avenue Road in Toronto, showing lot subdivisions. (A.J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Associates, 1992)

¹ This study was undertaken with Michael McClelland and the firm of A.J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Associates, Architects.

BY ANNE M. DE FORT-MENARES

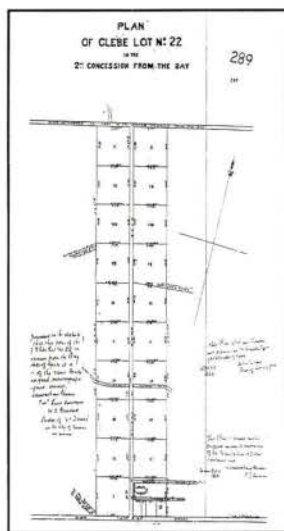


Figure 3 (left). "Plan of Glebe Lot 22 in the 2nd Concession from the Bay," surveyed by Wadsworth and Urwin, October 1868. (York RP 289)

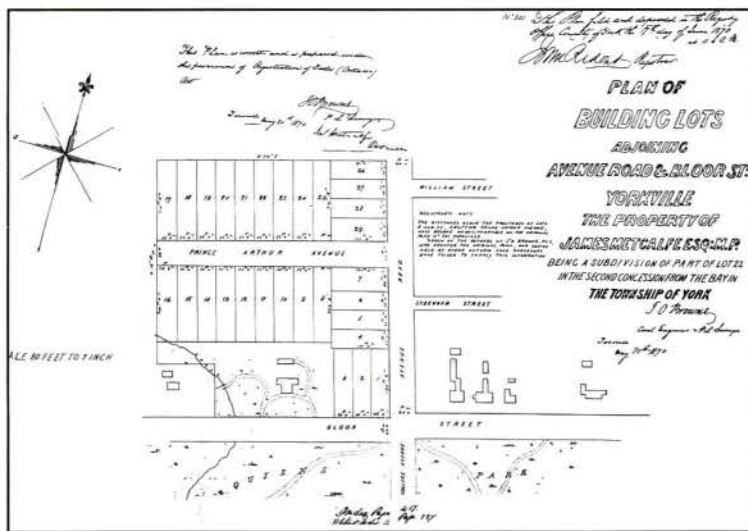


Figure 4 (centre). "Plan of Building Lots Adjoining Avenue Road & Bloor Sts., Yorkville. The Property of James Metcalfe Esq: M.P.," surveyed by J.O. Browne, May 1870. (York RP 301)

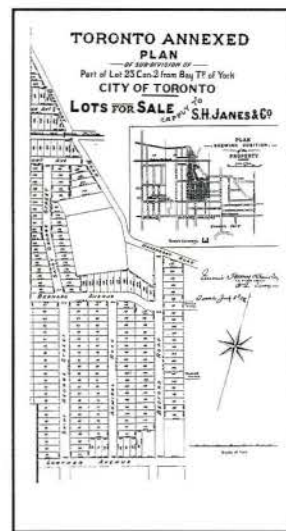


Figure 5 (right). "Toronto Annexed Plan of Sub-Division of Part of Lot 23 ... July 8, 1886." Only Lowther Avenue continued across Bedford Road into West Yorkville, to the right. (Metro Toronto Public Library)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANNEX

The Annex passed through four main periods of subdivision — all still visible — which correspond to larger cycles of prosperity and construction in Toronto. These cycles affected the historical development and present appearance of the area. The first subdivision, the 1792 British lot survey, established the basic Toronto grid and dedicated the land in question to the Anglican Church. In 1868, the rector of St. James Anglican Church initiated the second period of subdivision by dividing Lot 22 into 20 five-acre parcels between Bloor and what is now St. Clair, and laying Avenue Road through the parcel (figure 3). The lots were rented to a variety of tenants, most of whom were tradesmen.² The subdivision coincided with the beginning of a city-wide building boom, paralleled by increases in population and economic activity, that peaked in 1874.³

The third period of subdivision was a critical stage: three of the 20 five-acre church lots were subdivided by private speculators into streets and building lots, making a suburb of Yorkville. Subdivisions of the church land were registered by individuals acting singly or in partnership; speculative building was confined to relatively small projects.

The subdivisions related to the boundaries of the church lots. For example, the first lot subdivided was Lot I west of Avenue Road from Bloor to the back yards on the north side of Prince Arthur, laid out in 1870 by James Metcalfe (figure 4). Metcalfe anticipated the construction of estate villas like his own on Bloor, and the houses built on Prince Arthur Avenue in the 1870s originally had stables, outbuildings, and land around them. Prince Arthur was the first street in the third period of subdivision, the establishment of a suburban village. Metcalfe laid out two streets to the north in 1874 (Lowther and Elgin), and tradesmen filed plans for the others in 1873 (Boswell) and 1874 (Bernard). Modest lot sizes indicate that the other speculators probably anticipated an extension of the village of Yorkville. All the streets dead-ended against the western edge of Lot 22.

The fourth period of subdivision occurred when part of the privately-owned land to the west of the church lots was laid out by Simeon H. Janes in 1886 (figure 5). In purchasing the parcel from the Baldwin estate, Janes broke the local custom of families subdividing their own land. He successfully led a petition to annex the area to Toronto in 1886-87, and his loan and brokerage company developed the parcel. Janes' development company was a fairly large corporate endeavour, selling hundreds of lots directly to owners or builders, compared to the typical middle-level, individual street speculator who worked in West Yorkville. It seems that Yorkville attracted small speculators because the land in the 1870s was not perceived to have investment value. Janes, on the other hand, promoted his Annex's proximity to churches, transportation, and cultural attractions, all of which had not existed in 1870s.

The overlap of West Yorkville with Bedford Road on the eastern edge of Janes' development allows a comparison of differences in the development process, and their effect on the ground. Bedford Road was laid out in 1886 on farmland, so the houses were generally the first buildings on the land. Bedford was a destination for the upwardly mobile through West Yorkville, and had one of the steadiest occupancy rates of any street in the area.

As planned, the Annex was to be completely separate from West Yorkville, with only two avenues (Prince Arthur and Bernard) continuing across Bedford. As constructed, however, all the West Yorkville streets opened to Bedford. The opening of cross streets and the establishment of a neighbourhood beyond West Yorkville resulted in renewed construction activity, the registration and construction of Tranby Avenue in 1888, and the filling in of vacant lots and the construction of houses on street frontages even beyond the Yorkville boundary. On the east side of Bedford, the extremely generous lot depth of 157 feet was conditioned by the size of the Baldwin property

- 2 These included labourers, gardeners, a brickmaker, etc. Yorkville Assessment Role, 1862.
- 3 In her landmark article, Karen Buckley cautioned that there was no direct relation between population growth and building cycles. K.A.H. Buckley, "Urban Building and Real Estate Fluctuations in Canada," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18, no. 1 (February 1952): 48.
- 4 Jim Lemon and Stephen Speisman, "Annegonians, 1910 and 1923," in Lydia Burton and David Morley, eds., *The Annex Book* (unpublished MS at Toronto Public Library, Municipal Reference, 1978), fig. 1.6.6.
- 5 Tranby Avenue assessments for 1992 averaged \$320 on the south side, \$288 on the north.
- 6 Annex area residents have been classified by, among others, C.A. Russell, "The Establishment and the Industrial Elite, 1912-1920," *The Annex Book*, 1.5.
- 7 Peter W. Moore, "Public Services and Residential Development in a Toronto Neighbourhood, 1880-1915," *Journal of Urban History* 9, no. 4 (August 1983): 459.

just north of Lowther (141 feet on west side). Ultimately, new lots were severed from the backs of the Bedford corner lots and houses were built on the west ends of the cross streets. Architecturally, these were closer in style to the houses on Bedford than to the West Yorkville houses. This anomaly is evident on maps and on the ground, in the different architectural character of the end houses, and in the undeveloped, left-over land (figures 2, 11).

Subdivision plans have subsequently been registered on specific sites within the district, and property assembly in several locations has eliminated several of the original lot lines, but the overall structure of subdivision has remained constant. The four periods of subdivision are visible in the different character of the streets and in the relationship of architecture to lot size.

STREETS AND HOUSES IN THE EAST ANNEX

The character of the streets is determined by several factors. Street width and lot size determine the grain of the area: street width varies from the conventional 66 feet of Prince Arthur Avenue to the very narrow 48 feet of Tranby Avenue. Lot size determined the kinds of houses, and their relationship to each other. Prince Arthur started out with the largest lots, 53 feet wide, but the standard was about 50 feet. Builders generally placed two houses on each lot, and the survival of single lots is uncommon. Tranby Avenue's distinctive visual character comes from the tight spacing of houses built in a ten-year period: three houses were frequently squeezed onto one 50-foot lot, and frontages of less than 14 feet are common (figures 6, 7). There were negative social and economic repercussions to this density of housing, including low social status and assessment values, particularly along the north side of Tranby.⁴ Even today, property values on the north side are 10 percent lower per foot than the south side of Tranby Avenue.⁵

There was a clear correlation between lot size, street character, and assessment values. Boulevards, grass strips, and street trees contribute enormously to the quality of a street. On Prince Arthur Avenue, open lawns, grassy boulevards, and a tree canopy probably contributed to the high assessment values and the fashionableness of the street with Toronto establishment socialites⁶ and well-known architects after 1900. Building set-backs, combined with the 66-foot width, still make it a spacious and open street.

Another street with high assessment values, and with low out-migration, was Elgin Avenue, which also had treed boulevards on both sides and houses set back on larger lots. It was one of the Annex streets most moved to, and least moved from. On Boswell Avenue, the narrow 55-foot width did not prevent an allowance for small grass boulevards (now mostly displaced by parking pads). Boswell was a street to move from, although a number of moves occurred within the street.

Architecture varied according to the conditions of development, from private Regency-style villas on Prince Arthur Avenue to the speculative row housing of Tranby Avenue (figures 8, 9). The earlier houses of the 1870s and early 1880s were either modest stucco cottages, low to the ground and set back from the street, or self-confident urban villas and townhouses in the late Gothic Revival and Second Empire styles of the period. Lowther Avenue is notable for the number of rough-cast dwellings from the 1870s that survive on the south side, many of which are entered at grade level. The most architecturally mixed street is Boswell Avenue. Initially inhabited almost entirely by householders in the building trades, the street was renumbered at least three times because subdivision occurred with more frequency than on other streets: insertion of three houses where once there were two, re-division of lots, building in lanes, etc.

Servicing was a necessary forerunner of development, but did not activate it.⁷ Only on Tranby Avenue did public infrastructure have a direct correlation with the construction of housing. Sewers were laid on Tranby in 1888 and the street was paved with cedar blocks the following year. Almost half of the 58 houses currently on Tranby were built by 1889, the year after the water mains were laid, and almost three quarters had been built by 1892.

In many instances, the original buildings in the East Annex were replaced around 1900 by more substantial structures, reflecting changes in architectural fashion and in the tenor of the area. On Boswell Avenue, for example, a pair of rough-cast cottages that dated from the 1870s were replaced by numbers 32-32A-34 (1908) and 40-42-44 (1907), and one substantial rough-cast house on Prince Arthur Avenue, also of the mid-1870s, was replaced by the two houses at numbers 9 and 11.

An interesting example of the impact of the Annex development on West Yorkville architecture is 55 Boswell Avenue, the last lot on the Yorkville side and one which retains its original 50-foot frontage (figure 10). The same family occupied the house for more than 60 years. Stylistically, the house is not related to either area, because it is an amalgam of two houses of significantly different periods. The original house had been built near the middle of the lot about the late 1870s, in the third period of subdivision, and a substantial addition was built on the front around 1905, after Bedford Road was developed. Such evolutions can be related to the transition from the original West Yorkville character to the later the Annex identity. This was a result of social affiliation as much as physical contiguity. The types of development that were sanctioned in the first two-thirds of this century were a direct consequence of the socio-economic composition of the Annex.

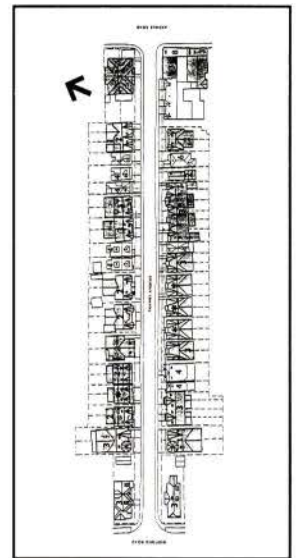
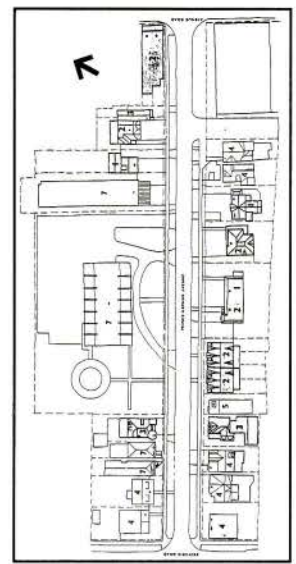


Figure 6 (top). Plan of Prince Arthur Avenue between Bedford Road and Avenue Road. The pre-1900 buildings have been shaded. The street has grass boulevards on both sides, and houses on large lots. A high rise apartment building built in the 1940-59 period occupies the north side of the street. (A.J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Associates, 1992)

Figure 7 (above). Plan of Tranby Avenue between Bedford Road and Avenue Road. The shaded houses were built between 1880 and 1899. Sidewalks are at the curb. (A.J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Associates, 1992)

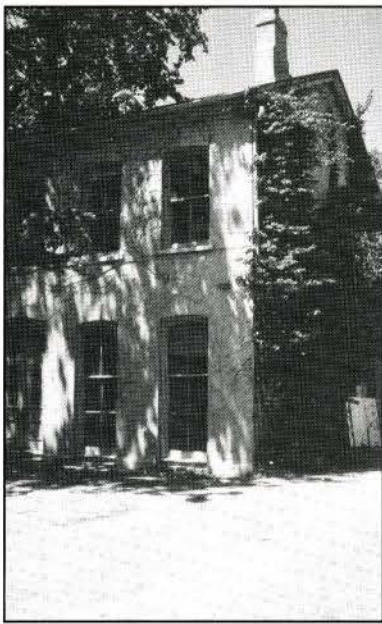


Figure 8 (left). 10 Prince Arthur Avenue, built in 1873. (A.M. de Fort-Menares, 1992)

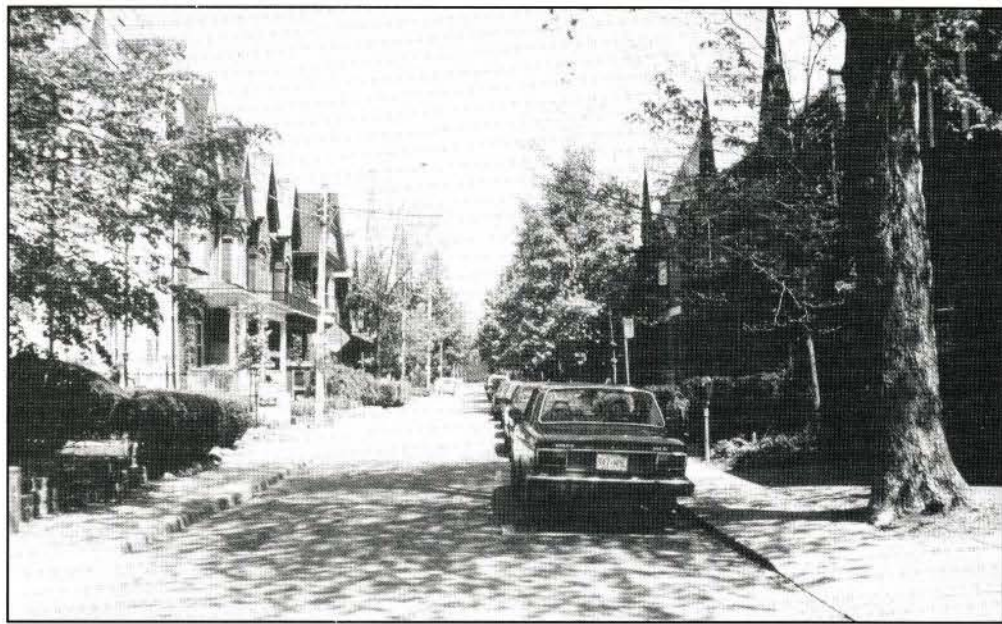


Figure 9 (right). View of speculatively-built row houses on Tranby Avenue, looking east to Avenue Road. (A.M. de Fort-Menares, 1992)

OCCUPANCY AND ARCHITECTURE

After 1900, the streets now associated with the East Annex sifted out into a social hierarchy that ran from respectable Bernard Avenue, dipping somewhat through Tranby and Boswell avenues, and peaking in terms of cachet along Prince Arthur Avenue from Avenue Road to Huron Street. Status was reflected in the tax assessments, which in 1910 were highest on Prince Arthur, Lowther, and the west side of Bedford. Families who considered themselves aristocratic or otherwise notable ensured their listing in the Toronto "Blue Books." While only three percent of the city's population, Annex residents represented 19 to 25 percent of the Blue Book addresses between 1900 and 1924.⁸

With the exception of Prince Arthur Avenue, the area was first occupied mainly by tradesmen and labourers. By 1923, more than 54 percent of residents were professional and managerial.⁹ By comparison, St. George Street to the west was inhabited in 1923 wholly by managerial, proprietorial or professional classes. The short streets of the East Annex were comparable to the West Annex streets of Brunswick, Howland, and Albany in terms of occupational structure and assessed values, but had a higher tenancy rate.¹⁰

Some striking patterns emerge from the occupancy data. Socially, the middle period of 1895-1920 was the most homogeneous. Mobility at that time often occurred within single streets, and there was pronounced mobility within the study area. This is typical for the time, when mobility was closely related to socio-economic standing and, obviously, the ability to ensure security of tenure. Four cases of long-term occupancy occurred on Bedford Road, where residents lived in their original houses for more than 40 years. This number was rarely matched on other streets, although each had at least one resident of 40 to 60 years standing.

The modest storey-and-a-half rough-cast

cottages of the 1870s, fine examples of which are still to be found at 23 and 41 Boswell Avenue, rapidly fell out of favour when the taller rooflines and deeper rooms of the brick-faced semi-detached houses, such as those lining Tranby Avenue, entered the vocabulary of speculative builders. Juxtapositions of architecturally dissimilar scales, textures, and siting are not often found on a single street, however; overall, there is considerable continuity of forms, materials, and siting. A limited number of facade typologies recur throughout the area, representing four main shifts in architectural taste. These are the Italianate, late Gothic Revival or Georgian "Survival" elements found on the early rough-cast cottages and polychromatic brick buildings; the Second Empire, with its characteristic mansard roofs; the tall brick Romanesque/Queen Anne town-houses that typify Tranby Avenue; and a gentle, wide variant of the Queen Anne Revival in a brown or orangey brick, enlivened with shingles and towers. Excellent examples of this style are found at 49-51 Bernard Avenue (1901), by the architect A.M. Rice, and at 52 Elgin Avenue (1897-98), designed by F.H. Herbert (figure 11).

Within these broad categories there are variations and themes which give the area much of its character and cohesion. In particular, there were four principle designs developed for semi-detached houses, depending on whether the building was to be expressed as a single or double house. Buildings erected after 1920 introduced a variety of modern architectural pursuits, including revivals of historic styles. Twentieth century construction in the district is less easily characterized by specific elements, but tends to a straightforwardness in material, form, and placement of openings, and a simplicity of detailing.

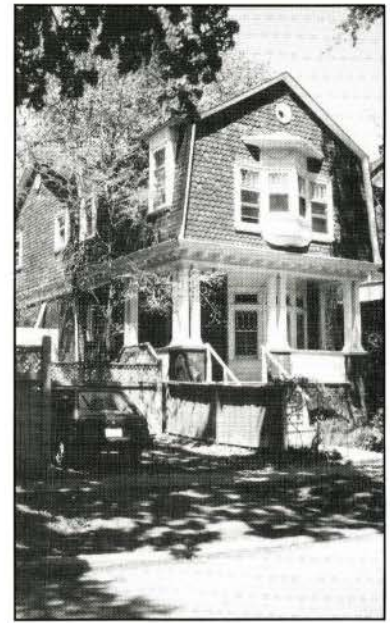
COMMUNITY CONTROL IN THE EAST ANNEX
Annex residents for many years resisted changes to

8 Lemon and Speisman, 1.6, p. 4, and figure 1.6.6.

9 Lemon and Speisman, 1.6, p. 4.

10 Lemon and Speisman, figure 1.6.3.

11 The East Annex has experienced many of the changes, such as land use and social composition, that typify urban expansion. Some principal sources for the relation of suburbs to urban growth in Toronto are: K.M. Campbell, "The Changing Residential Patterns in Toronto, 1880-1910" (M.A. diss., University of Toronto, 1971); Peter G. Goheen, *Victorian Toronto, 1850 to 1900: Pattern and Process of Growth* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); Gunther Gad and Deryck Holdsworth, "Building for City, Region and Nation," in V.L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); J.W. Watson, "Centre and Periphery: The Transfer of Urban Ideas from Britain to Canada," in John Patten, ed., *The Expanding City: Essays in Honour of Professor Jean Gottmann* (London: Academic Press, 1983); J.W.R. Whitehand, "Fringe Belts: a Neglected Aspect of Urban Geography," *Institute of British Geographers Transactions* 41 (June 1967).



their neighbourhood.¹¹ Early residents were anxious to protect the quality of their area, and to do so they exploited whatever means were available. Planning controls developed relatively slowly in Canada, with the first comprehensive zoning bylaw in Toronto being adopted in 1954. As a conservative force, zoning benefitted the early residents only as long as the founding interest dominated and controlled change. As the owner-occupants representing the founding interests declined in numbers, they were replaced by more commercially-oriented interests, and zoning responded to these new concerns.¹²

The Annex changed considerably in the 20th century, as better suburbs such as Lawrence Park and Forest Hill were built to the north and northwest, inducing Annex residents or potential residents to locate elsewhere. The departure in 1931 of Lady Eaton from 182 Lowther Avenue (near Spadina) was a clear signal of the declining prestige of the whole Annex area.¹³ Rooming houses and multiple-family occupancy in the Annex during the housing shortages of the 1920s also contributed to the changing character, as did the tenants who were accommodated. Residents resisted rooming houses by hiring private detectives to stake out suspicious households. In 1921 they successfully had Bedford, Bernard, and Lowther avenues restricted to single-family detached residential use.¹⁴ In 1943, multiple-family occupancies were sanctioned by the federal Wartime Prices and Trade Board because of the housing shortage. The Board effectively cancelled local zoning restrictions to allow roomers and boarders in any dwelling in Canada.¹⁵ Single-family residential use in the Annex declined from 71 percent in 1939 to 25 percent by 1972.¹⁶

Institutional use is the usual stage of development to follow prestige suburban residential, and institutions had been present in the Annex since 1910, beginning with a Catholic school on Prince Arthur Avenue, but in this area residential use has

predominated.

The opening of the nearby St. George subway station in 1966 introduced new development pressures, characterized by land assembly, high-rise development, and increased commercialization of uses. There are upwards of 30 buildings in the area which postdate 1930; their greatest impact has come from a significant change in the scale of development. The assembly of six lots on Prince Arthur Avenue to build an apartment block, and of eight lots on Avenue Road to build a condominium between Elgin and Lowther, introduced significant changes to the streets on a scale that affects the entire district.

Residents are once again attempting to regain control of their neighbourhood, to stop demolitions and control development. Design guidelines for land use, building alterations, vegetation, street paving, and lighting have been developed by consultants working with a ratepayers' committee as part of a Heritage Conservation District study. These guidelines are being considered by City of Toronto planners, along with stronger zoning controls based on the type of heritage zoning used in Ottawa, enforced through the provisions of the Planning Act and the Ontario Heritage Act. While regulating private development and property design may be seen as a form of social control, it has the benefit of targeting the public rather than the private behaviour of those to whom it applies.

THE EAST ANNEX ILLUSTRATES A CRITICAL SHIFT in the scale of urban development in the city. Research has shown that this shift, which is legible in the streets and buildings of the East Annex, is historically rooted in the social and physical make-up of the neighbourhood, creating a character which has persisted to the present day. Efforts currently underway will determine whether the singular character of the East Annex will survive into the future.

Figure 10 (left). The Teagle family house at 55 Boswell Avenue, first built in the centre of the lot in the 1870s, with a front added out to the street in 1905. (A.M. de Fort-Menares, 1992)

Figure 11 (right). 52 Elgin Avenue, designed in 1898 for A.H. Sydene, a clerk at the Legislative Assembly, by architect F. H. Herbert. Situated at the end of a street laid out in 1874, its architecture is typical of the Annex. Open land beside the house is part of the severance from adjacent Bedford Road properties. (A.M. de Fort-Menares, 1992)

12 Peter W. Moore, "Zoning and Neighbourhood Change: The Annex in Toronto, 1900-1970," *The Canadian Geographer* 26, no. 1 (spring 1982): 21-36.

13 Lemon and Speisman, 1.6, p. 7. Another urbanite who fled to the country was E.R. Wood, who moved to Bayview.

14 Stuart Schoenfeld, "Formation of a Neighbourhood: The Definition of the Annex and its Boundaries," *The Annex Book*, 1.4, p. 5.

15 Moore, 32.

16 Elizabeth Cull et al., *The Annex Study: An Independent Input into the Part II Planning Process. An Interim Report* (Toronto: York University, Urban Studies Program, 1972), 33. Courtesy Community History Project, Toronto.