

Virgil School of Music
or Port Arthur Conservatory of Music
337 Van Norman Street



Year Built: 1905

Architect: Marshall B. Aylsworth

Style: Queen-Anne Revival

Notable Features: asymmetrical design.

Dramatically designed roof, which sweeps down from the gable to cover the entry porch

Designation Date: May 23rd, 1989

By-Law No.: 109 - 1989

Legal Description: PT Park Lot 6 S Van Norman

Current Owner: John William Morrison

Description:

This residential house, which stands on Van Norman Street, was once home to the Port Arthur Conservatory of Music. The land was sold to Martha Chinnock Wells in 1905 from Annie Jane Barrie. The property cost was \$750. Interestingly, the title record makes note of the marital status of both women, describing Wells as a “spinster” and Barrie as a “widow.” Wells managed to secure a \$2,500 mortgage in November of 1905 and built the house which was to become her music school.

Little is known of the life of Martha Chinnock Wells, who served as music teacher, principal and home owner of the Port Arthur Conservatory of Music. She did change her name several times over the course of her life, from Martha Chinnock Wells to Martha C. Wilkie, and finally to Mina Chinnock McMillan, when she married Albert Daniel McMillan. The couple relocated to Toronto, birthplace of Albert Daniel McMillan, and it was here that Martha (Mina) died in 1936.

Architecture:

The property at 337 Van Norman Street is located in the Red River Ward of the City of Thunder Bay. The asymmetrical design and the variety of shapes and texture identify this house as an example of the Queen-Anne Revival. Two-and-a-half storeys in height, the house has two steep gables at the roofline; the most dramatic feature is the roof which sweeps down from the gable to cover the shaped entry porch on the main level. The ground floor is constructed of rubble masonry in black stone, the second level suggests the Tudor with its stucco and half-timbering; and shingles fill the gable ends.

The entrance itself is segmental arched, a shape repeated in the first floor window of the façade. An oriel window highlights the second storey while horizontal bands of windows provide light at the top level. A cantilevered second-storey roofed balcony on the east side provides a further picturesque detail. The front attic window has iron, diamond grill work. The combination of design elements and the grand scale create a unique building.

Architect: Marshall B. Aylsworth (1850 – 1911):

Marshall B. Aylsworth was born in Northumberland County, Ontario. He trained as an architect in Toronto from 1878 – 1880 and then moved to Collingwood. He designed numerous churches, private residences and public buildings. In addition to creating the architectural plan for the Virgil School of Music, Aylsworth also designed the Port Arthur Masonic Hall in 1910. He was apparently quite enamoured with the Victorian Gothic style of architecture.