

Historical Overview

The early history and development of Port Arthur has been well documented in publications like the Waverly Park Heritage Conservation District Study, Thunder Bay – From Rivalry to Unity, and A History of Thunder Bay. The following examination is an analysis of the history of the McVicar Creek – Harrington Court area, but does not deal with the general history of Port Arthur.

The MicVicars

The first person to establish a homestead in Port Arthur's Prince Arthur's Landing area was Robert McVicar. After retiring as the Chief Trader for the Hudson's Bay Company in the late 1850's, Robert and Christie McVicar, along with their youngest children Christina, Victoria and George arrived at "The Landing"¹ in the autumn of 1859. Upon their arrival McVicar arranged to buy a large plot of land for 20 cents per acre in the vicinity of what is now McVicar Creek. Not long after the acquisition of this property McVicar laid the foundations for a new home at along the waterway. Despite his apparent intentions to live in this area along with his large holdings of land (600 acres), Robert decided to move his family to Fort William so that he could work as the HBC postmaster. He bought a plot of land in the Fort William area and built a new home.²

Robert McVicar died in 1864 leaving his property holdings to his wife Christie. His daughters Christina and Victoria in 1867 applied to reacquire the 600 acres of land that their father had owned near their first home at "The Landing." McVicar's daughters were successful in reacquiring the land and with the passing of their mother in 1878, held considerable property holdings in the Fort William and Port Arthur areas.³ Victoria McVicar became the sole benefactor with the passing of her sister in 1895.

Victoria McVicar died in 1899 and left her Port Arthur lands to her niece, Christine Crane, Janet Maud Strathy, George McVicar, and John Farrand Ruttan who was also the executor of the will. Victoria McVicar states in her will, "As to my Port Arthur property I direct that the ten acre block known as the "Homestead" property lying between Court and Algoma streets, shall be sold by my executor as soon as convenient."⁴ It

appears that James Farrand Ruttan, with the consent of George McVicar became the sole agent to sell the McVicar land holdings in Port Arthur in 1903.⁵ According to the Port Arthur Tax Collectors rolls the “homestead” property remained in George McVicar’s possession until 1903. The collector’s rolls list the property as a 10 acre plot of land bordering the North side of McVicar Creek between Algoma and Court Streets which had a home and garden on it. The property was sold to James Meek in 1903, and then subdivided into thirty-two lots.⁶ Lots 12-15 were then further subdivided in 1911, but was not developed until the later 1920’s.⁷

Harrington Court

One example of the rich history of the buildings in the area is demonstrated in an analysis of 170 Algoma St. N. Despite being transformed from a home into a commercial type property in 1984, the outside architecture of 170 Algoma St. N. appears to have remained as originally constructed. The only apparent major structural change was to the verandah/sun porch at the front of the house which was enclosed and bay windows added to allow for additional seating for a new restaurant that opened on the premises in 1985.⁸

The original owner of the home was Daniel K. Campbell and the building permit for the construction of the house was issued on August 20, 1914.⁹ The current lot is “L” shaped with the back portion of the property skirting behind 172 Algoma St. N (now 178 Algoma St. N.). Early survey maps of the area show 170 and 172 Algoma St. N. properties as one large plot of land 150 feet wide by 198 feet deep.¹⁰ After acquiring the property in 1913, Campbell apparently subdivided the land creating the two properties as they exist today (except for the address change). It appears that Campbell rented out the 172 Algoma St. property as in 1913¹¹ the tenant listed was Mary Gehl, wife of Conrad Gehl the original owner of the property.¹² The 172 Algoma St. N. property remained in the Campbell family until 1946.¹³

Campbell was 62 when he began construction of his family’s new home. The name of the architect and builder listed on the building permit is W. T.

Crouch and a garage was added to the property in 1915.¹⁴ While the 1919-1920 Port Arthur assessment rolls list Campbell's occupation as "Esquire," which demonstrates his high standing in the community,¹⁵ Campbell's daughter Marjorie states that her father was once owner of the Royal Hotel¹⁶, Campbell Motors and several other businesses in town.¹⁷

After the passing of their mother, Catherine, in 1934 and their father in 1936, two of Campbell's daughters, Marjorie (Campbell) and Kathleen Carmichael, continued to live at the residence. Kathleen was a social reporter at the Daily Times-Journal for twenty four years until her death in 1955.¹⁸ After Kathleen's passing the house was sold and Marjorie moved to an Elm Street location.

The home was bought in 1955 by John Frankow and the house remained in the Frankow family until 1984 when it was sold to Richard Lenz. Lenz turned the building into the Harrington Court Restaurant which he operated until August of 1999. Ownership of the property changed several more times between 1999 and 2004. A fire on the premises on April 10, 2002 caused substantial internal damage to the building but the outside structure was not harmed. 170 Algoma St. N. is now called the Dragonfly Lounge/Ma's Restaurant and remains a good example of modified Tudor styled architecture.

¹ Approximately four miles north of Fort William

² Thunder Bay Museum, McVicar Family Papers, Series A 25/1/1, File papers

³ Ibid

⁴ Thunder Bay Museum, McVicar papers Series A 25/1/1, Legal papers

⁵ Ibid

⁶ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 24, Tax Collectors Rolls – TBA 2602-2604 and Thunder Bay Museum Microfilm, Registered Plan 131.

⁷ Thunder Bay Museum Microfilm, Registered Plan 473.

⁸ The Chronicle Journal, Thunder Bay, March 8, 1985, p.15.

⁹ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 169, TBA 5468, Building Permit 593, 1914.

¹⁰ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 29, TBA 2947, Land for Parks Purposes, Map 1913.

¹¹ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 24, TBA 2650, Collector's Rolls, 1913, p.133

¹² City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 24, TBA 2675, Collector's Rolls, 1915, p.15 In 1876 Conrad Gehl founded the Brewery that was located between McVicar Creek and the 170 Algoma St. N. property. The Brewery burned down in 1877 and was rebuilt, eventually becoming the Port Arthur Beverage Company. For more information see Joseph M. Mauro's Thunder Bay: A history, Thunder Bay: Lehto Printers LTD, 1981, p.105 and 110.

¹³ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 24, TBA 3089, Collector's Rolls, 1946. The property was apparently sold to J. Snider in 1946.

¹⁴ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 169, TBA 5468, Building Permit 117, 1915.

¹⁵ City of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 23, TBA 2291, Assessment Rolls, p.28

¹⁶ Once located at the corner of Red River Road and Court Street.

¹⁷ The Chronicle-Journal, April 4, 1985, p.3

¹⁸ The Fort William Daily Times Journal, July 11, 1955, p.2

McVicar Creek - Harrington Court Heritage District

Primary Study Area - Year of Construction

1900-1910

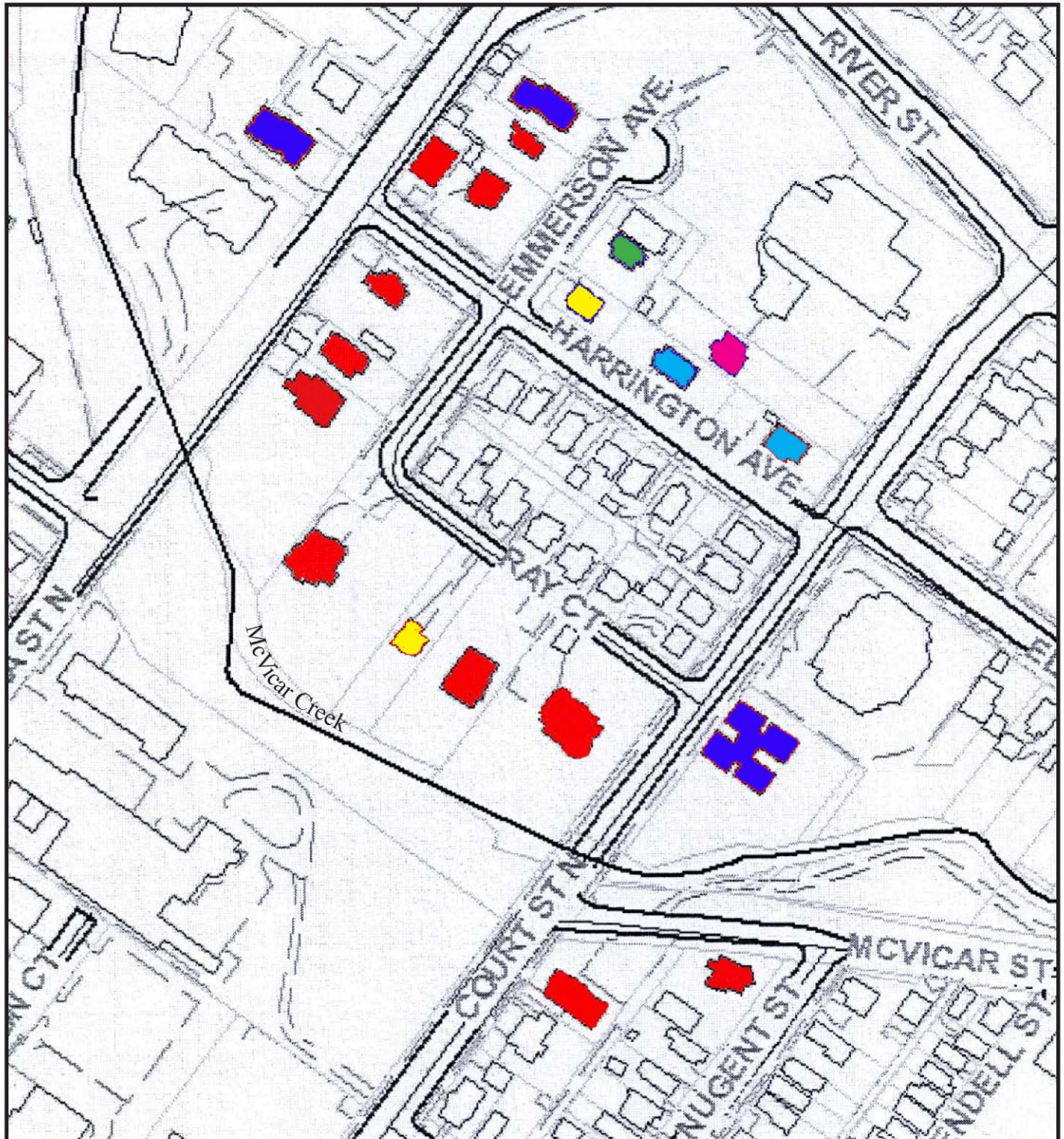
1911-1920

1921-1930

1931-1940

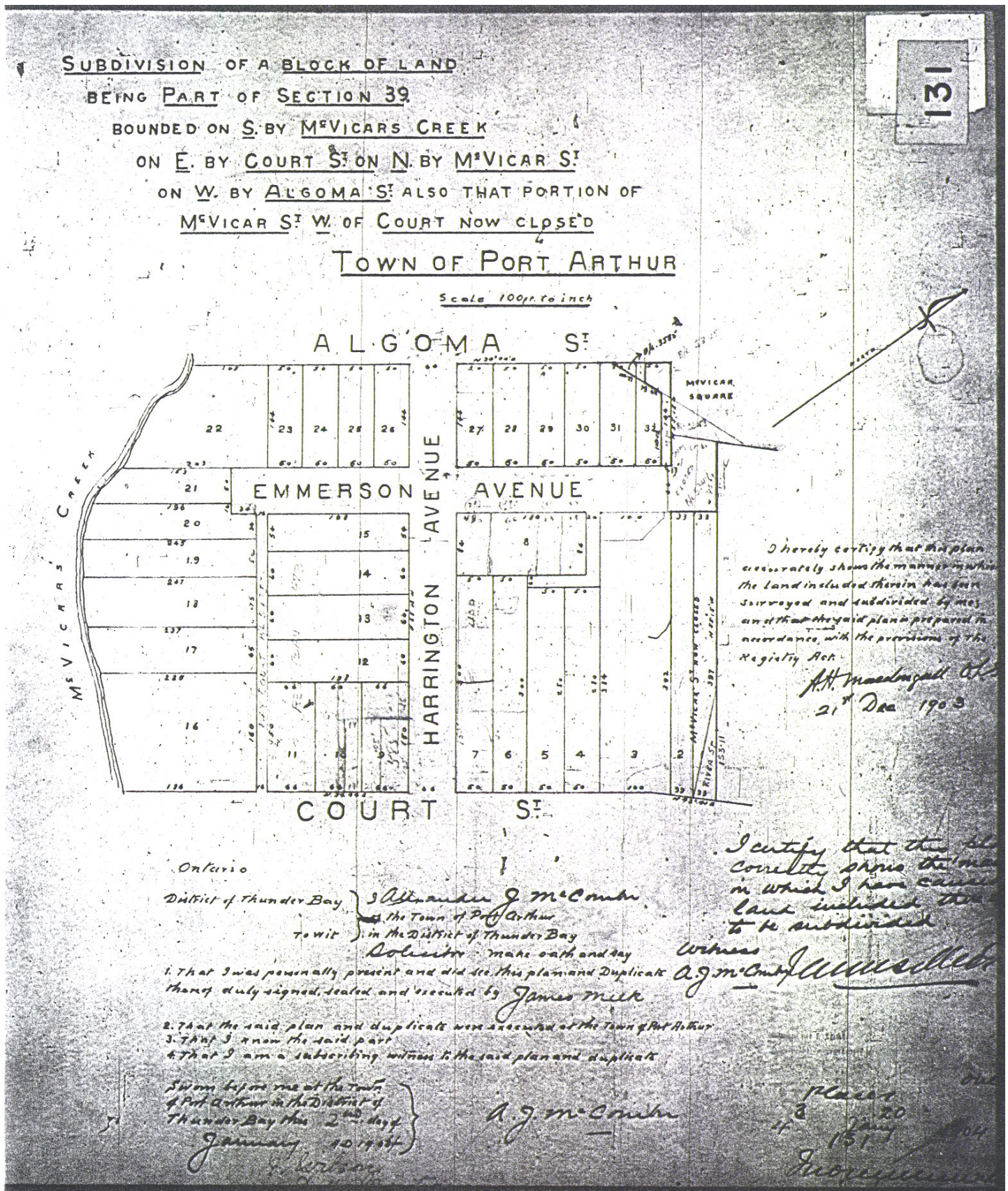
1941-1950

1951-1960

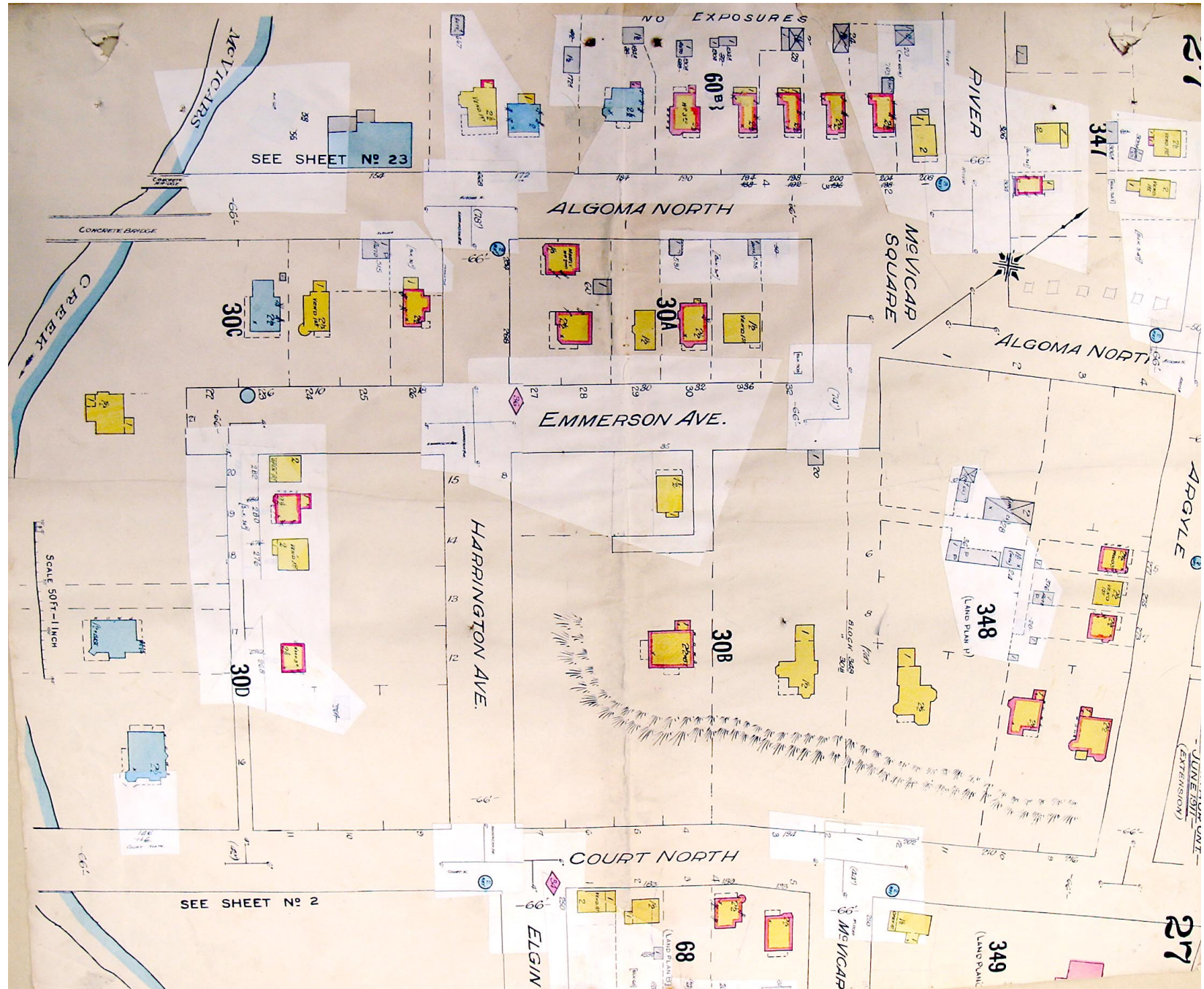


Original Survey of the McVicar Homestead Subdivision - Dec. 1903

Source: Thunder Bay Museum - Microfilm - Registered Plan 131



Port Arthur Fire Insurance Map, 1911 - Section 27



1928 Map of McVicar Creek Area

Source: Cirty of Thunder Bay Archives, Series 29, TBA 2957 - File - Lands for Parks Purposes

