

Statement of Significance

Riverholme

20469 Willoughby Road, Melville

Town of Caledon, Ontario

April 2024



ROBINSON

EST. 1999

HERITAGE CONSULTING

Property Identification:

Name: Riverholme

Municipal Address: 20469 Willoughby Road, Melville, Town of Caledon

Legal Description: Part Lot 26 Concession 1 West of Hurontario Street, Township of Caledon as in R0673696; Caledon

Location: The subject property is located on the northeast side of Willoughby Road, northwest of its intersection with High Point Sideroad, on the northwest bank of the Credit River

Summary:

The cultural heritage value of the property known as 20469 Willoughby Road in the Town of Caledon meets six of the nine criteria for determining cultural heritage value as set out in the *Ontario Heritage Act* under Regulation 9/06 as amended by Regulation 569/22. These are criteria 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

The property is known as Riverholme and is both longstanding and well known. The house and garden were designed and built in stages by Arthur Huston (of the Hollywood Huston family) a well-known vaudevillian actor, dancer, musician, set designer and landscape architect and his wife Helen, fine furniture maker, professional classical singer, singing teacher and published horticulturalist.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The **design value or physical value** of the property at 20469 Willoughby Road, known historically as Riverholme, is linked to its 1.5-storey dwelling and several of its landscape features. Set on the banks of the Credit River, the house and garden were designed and built in stages by Arthur Huston, a well-known vaudevillian actor, dancer, musician, set designer and landscape architect, and his third wife Helen Huston, a furniture maker, professional classical singer, singing teacher, poet and published horticulturalist. The house at Riverholme is a **rare example** of the English Cottage style with Craftsman, Tudor Revival influences, popular in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s and **displays a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit**. It is the only known example of the English Cottage style in Caledon. The additions and improvements the Hustons made to the house as reported in the local newspaper in 1933 created the building form that is seen today, including the complex 1.5-storey roofline with shed dormers, two large fieldstone chimneys, an enclosed front vestibule and a large, flat-roofed sunroom/conservatory.

The house exterior is partially clad in round fieldstone, rising from grade to roughly the bottom of the windowsills around the perimeter. At the conservatory, the fieldstone is used as a load bearing knee wall, executed to provide an exposed finished stone interior and exterior topped by multi-pane wood windows. The top of the stone wall curves down on the south and west elevations to allow for larger windows to let in more sunlight. The upper half of the house exterior is clad in squared butt wood shingles of varied widths applied in straight, parallel courses that flare out in a belcast curve at the level of the upper floor plate, a common Craftsman style design element. The main (side) gable walls of the house face the road and the rear of the lot respectively and both have large, fieldstone chimneys. The enclosed vestibule sheltering the front entry, which faces the Credit River, is characterized by an asymmetrical curved gable roofline and arched Dutch style plank door with oversized, Tudor-inspired hardware. The principle windows in the house are horizontally coupled and tripled casement sashes with four and six pane arrangements. The conservatory windows are vertically oriented sashes with fifteen and nine pane arrangements.

Riverholme has **significant historical and associative value** due to its **direct and long-term association** with Arthur Huston. Huston's grandfather and parents (Moore Huston and Jennie Campbell) had settled in Caledon Township in the mid-19th century. Although Arthur was born in Michigan in 1882, his family returned to Canada shortly afterward. Much of Arthur's boyhood was spent in Caledon Township environs with family. By 1902 Huston had achieved success performing in American cities as a juggling vaudevillian comic with his first wife May McDonald as "Huston & Dallas". After May's death in 1907, Arthur continued developing his career creating and performing several shows, including Stanley in Africa (1908-1909); Roosevelt in Africa (1908-1915); A Night in the Jungle (1920); and The Bug Hunter (1921). Huston developed carpentry and other artistic skills from making all his own sets and also training animals for his shows. In 1909, Huston married a well-known Hungarian born musician Antoinette Dvorak, whose stage name was "Czinka Panna".

In 1910, Arthur Huston purchased 65 acres near Melville that included the subject property where he would live, farm and keep his animals when not travelling for performances until his death in 1961. In 1922, Arthur married his third wife, the widow Helen (Paterson) Qua. The 1931 Census indicated Arthur, Helen and Arthur Huston Jr. were living in a four-room house on the property. As performance work opportunities dwindled in the late 1920s, Arthur and Helen Huston designed and built a nine-hole golf course north of the house, which opened in 1930 as the 'Riverholme Golf Club'. The course was supplied by a tree nursery and landscape gardening business also established by the Hustons on the property. Arthur renovated the old barn north of their home to become the golf course club house, and many visitors remarked over the years how its interior appeared like one of his stage sets.

Riverholme also has **historical value or associative value** because it **reflects the work and ideas** of Arthur and Helen Huston, who contributed significantly to the Melville and Orangeville communities. Helen published articles and lectured on horticulture and interior design many times over the years. Arthur volunteered his talents within the community, often playing the cello, tap dancing or designing and building sets for local theatrical productions. His writings were also published in the local Orangeville paper, often advocating for the maintenance of the natural landscape, hills and trees and for the protection of wild animals.

Collectively, Arthur and Helen Huston supported many local causes, raising funds and awareness through lectures and events hosted at Riverholme, including those of wounded war veterans, the Red Cross and local hospitals as well as horticultural events, local plays, concerts and golf tournaments. As farmer, landscape architect and nurseryman, Arthur impacted the community and surrounding landscape. Together, he and Helen designed and built the house at Riverholme as well as five acres of beautiful perennial gardens, which included ponds, a fountain, lawns, stone works, a tennis court and a tea house. The majority of these features are extant within the 2.46 acre subject property.

Arthur was the cousin of Hollywood film actor Walter Huston, second cousin to Hollywood director John Huston and third cousin to Angelica Huston, a current Hollywood actor. Close family ties brought the Hollywood Hustons to Riverholme, along with other notable Hollywood stars including Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Elizabeth Taylor, and Vivian Leigh, to relax and play in the beautiful country setting.

The property known as Riverholme has **contextual value** as it helps **define, maintain and support** the rural character of Willoughby Road in the rural community of Melville with its mature plantings and vestiges of former gardens; the unobstructed view of the house from the gate at Willoughby Road through mature trees and shrubs; and the proximity and orientation of the house front to the Credit River. The property is **visually and historically** linked to the adjacent golf course, owned and operated by the Hustons from 1930-1958, at which time it was sold to local members of the club and renamed the 'Orangeville Golf Club'. The Orangeville Golf Club continues to provide the community with recreational pursuits amid a landscape enjoyed and promoted by Arthur and Helen Huston.

Description of Heritage Attributes

The following heritage attributes of the property known historically as "Riverholme" at 20469 Willoughby Road in the Town of Caledon are recommended to be protected through a by-law under section 29, Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Heritage attributes that convey the **design value and physical value** of the house as a **representative example of the English Cottage style with** Craftsman and Tudor Revival influences popular in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s:

- Form, massing and height of the 1933 house built by Arthur Huston and Helen Huston
- Complex 1.5-storey roofline with shed dormers
- Two large fieldstone chimneys
- Large, single-storey, flat-roofed sunroom/conservatory with S curved rafter tails, concrete capped round fieldstone load bearing walls exposed both inside and out; stone mantel with niches, decorative cut logs within the stonework, stone floor, raised and curved stone hearth and steps into the main house
- Fieldstone foundation/basement walls
- Original exterior cladding materials of square butt wood shingles, horizontal wood/bark siding, and rounded fieldstone applied to the lower walls and to construct the chimneys
- Shingled belcast curve at the upper floor plate on all elevations
- Metal, S-shaped brace/form on face of both chimneys
- Front vestibule with an asymmetrical gable roof design and arched, Dutch door with large strap hinges, door knocker, handle hardware, interior light, and built-in bench
- Location, size, scale of original exterior window and door openings
- Original wood window sashes and doors including their groupings, pane arrangements and associated hardware (whether installed or currently in storage)
- Stone fireplace mantles and hearths
- French doors in living room, including associated hardware
- Any original window or door openings or original exterior materials that may be concealed by additions or the wood board and batten

Heritage attributes that convey the property's **design value and physical value** by showing a **high degree of craftsmanship, artistic merit** and **reflecting the work and ideas** of the owners as landscape designers and builders, and that also convey the property's **historical and associative value** for their **direct association** with Arthur Huston and Helen Huston as prominent residents and landscape designers significant to the Melville and Orangeville communities:

- Loop wire gate with stone and concrete gate walls flanking the driveway, including the large globes and niches
- Stone and concrete circular pool with centre feature

- Stone and concrete patio in front of the front door enclosure of the house
- Low stone and concrete wall with steps as stage structure
- Stone and concrete curved pool with wooden bridge and guard rails
- Remnant stone and bottle walls of the small outbuilding
- Step location and lower landing at the river in front of the house
- Landscape of mature trees and shrubs, including any specimens that are unusual and likely intentionally planted by the Hustons as part of the landscape design

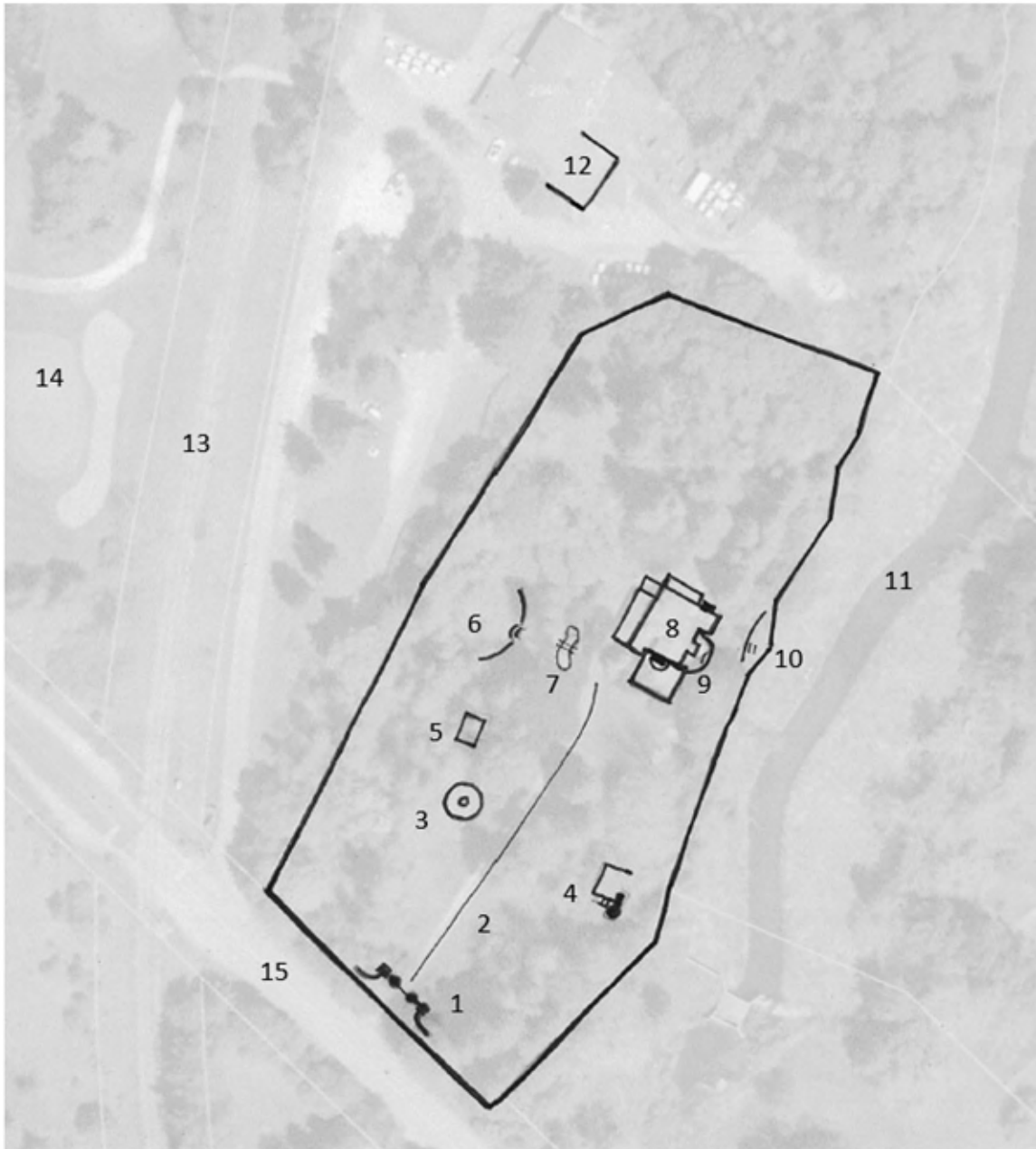
Heritage attributes that convey the property's **contextual value** for its contribution to defining, maintaining and supporting the rural fabric and character of Willoughby Road in the small community of Melville and its visual and historical links to its surroundings:

- Mature tree and shrub plantings and vestiges of Riverholme's former gardens
- Unobstructed views of the Huston house from the stone gate at Willoughby Road
- Setback of the house from Willoughby Road and its location adjacent and front-oriented to the Credit River
- Location adjacent to the Orangeville Golf Club, part of Arthur Huston's original property and which he and Helen Huston had designed, built, owned and operated from 1930 to 1958

Attributes of property that are **not** considered to be of cultural heritage value include:

- The large flat roofed addition to the northwest elevation
- The shed roof lean-to style addition to the northeast elevation
- Exterior door openings converted from the original window openings on the northwest and southwest sides of the second floor
- Exterior wood stairs to flat roof of one-storey addition to the northwest elevation
- Tree and shrub specimens determined by an arborist to be in poor health, invasive or those that are too close to and risk damaging or block views to and from the house;
- Neglected shrub specimens meant to be kept pruned that are now oversized and cannot be pruned back around the perimeter of the house;
- Volunteer species that are not at risk (i.e. black raspberry thicket that has grown up off the northeast corner of the house)

20469 Willoughby Road “Riverholme” – Site Sketch



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| 1. Gate | 9. Front patio |
| 2. Driveway | 10. Steps to river |
| 3. Circular Pond | 11. Credit River |
| 4. Stone and bottles remnant | 12. Barn foundation remnant beside golf clubhouse |
| 5. Shed | 13. Railway track |
| 6. Stage | 14. Orangeville Golf Club green |
| 7. Curved Pond | 15. Willoughby Road |
| 8. House | |