

Statement of Significance

A statement of significance is a heritage planning tool that identifies the heritage value of a resource, and the elements that contribute to its heritage character (“character defining elements”). The retention of character-defining elements is a best practice for management of heritage resources.

Description

The W.J. Mathers House 'Altnadene', is a two-and-one-half storey wood frame house set in a large terraced garden, now located in Deer Lake Park. Built as a family home, it is designed in the British Arts and Crafts style enriched by Tudor, Romanesque, and medieval details.

Heritage Value

'Altnadene' was constructed in the Deer Lake Crescent subdivision, which was originally promoted as an upper class neighbourhood. It represents one of the first residential developments in the City of Burnaby that required buildings to be of a specific value, thus demonstrating the desire for exclusivity among the successful businessmen who chose to settle in the area. The house and grounds illustrate the social, cultural, lifestyle and leisure sensibilities of the owners in the Deer Lake Crescent subdivision: such values as social aspiration, racial exclusivity, demonstration of architectural taste, importance of a landscaped garden, and the provision of facilities for fashionable pursuits such as lawn tennis.

The estate is historically significant for its connection to William John Mathers (1859-1929), an early pioneer who arrived in New Westminster in 1876, an enterprising grain dealer, businessman, alderman, president of the Board of Trade and various other local organizations, and a 'public spirited and progressive citizen.'

Designed for Mathers and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Jane (Whelan) Mathers (1869-1939), by Burnaby architect Frank William Macey (1863-1935), the Arts and Crafts style of the Mathers House contributes to the overall stylistic ambiance of the collection of homes now preserved in Deer Lake Park, displaying an eclectic array of details that give it a unique identity. The first resident architect in Burnaby, Macey was born and trained in England where he was well-respected for having published two standard texts for the architectural profession. He settled in Burnaby in the first decade of the twentieth century and obtained a number of commissions from prominent businessmen who were building grand homes in the new community of Deer Lake. He designed mostly in the British Arts and Crafts style and introduced the use of rough-cast stucco for building exteriors, a characteristic for which he was renowned.

The house also has an important connection to Burnaby's history as it later served as a convalescent home for soldiers wounded on the battlefield during the First World War. Indicative of the evolving functionality of the site, a classroom wing was added in 1939 after Benedictine Monks acquired the house and it was operated as the Seminary of Christ the King.

Character-Defining Elements

- Prominent corner location within a park setting, in relation to the Anderson residence
- Irregular form and massing - irregular roof line, including a central pyramidal hipped section and open gable ends to front and sides, with cedar shingle cladding
- Exterior of rough-cast stucco and half-timbering
- Eclectic exterior details such as the Tudor arches of the verandah and the medieval crenellations of the tower
- Mixture of double-hung and casement, with transom, wooden-sash windows
- Massive chimneys of Kilgard firebrick
- Surviving interior details such as fireplaces, doors and leaded glass
- Wrought iron gates, massive gate-posts inscribed with 'Altnadene' and granite walls at the corner entry of the property