



The present O'Neil House Hotel, also known as the Simcoe House Hotel, Alma House and Hillsdale Hotel, is believed to have been built in 1882, on a tavern and halfway house stand dating from about 1850.

The site of the building is historically important bordering on Penetanguishene Road (deviation road) at approximately the midpoint between Barrie and Penetanguishene. The stand was therefore

an important stagecoach stop and it was here that the horses were changed. The present building is believed to be the last remaining example of the hotels which were once numerous on the Penetanguishene Road.

The structure is a frame building, probably with some timber frame elements. It stands virtually in its original state with very little loss or alteration. The overall plan is a "T" layout, but the easterly "Tail" was probably built at the same time as the main section, or within a few years. The building is one-and-a-half storeys, with a centre hall and stair which services the entire building, and a small service stair in the rear. Some of the exterior (apparently original) stucco or pebble-dash finish remains with virtually all of the exterior door and window trim, belt coursing, soffits and fascia. The dado which remains on the west front is an addition of about 1910. The original porch is lost but is clearly shown in existing photographs.

Inside, the south portion of the main block is the men's beverage room (with a separate door to the street) with the tap room behind. It retains the original blue painted, should-height dado. In the north portion were two rooms (the partition has been lost), one of which has a panelled dado that is very unusual in Simcoe County. Upstairs in the north part of the main block is what appears to have been a ballroom (it was once used as a billiards room). The rest of the building appears to have been rooms for guests, but there must have been a winter kitchen as well.

Of particular importance is the survival of a great deal of original paint finish in the interior.

Also of special importance are the unusual and perhaps unique shape of the window frames and sash, and the panel designs of the front door.

Designated Features

The important characteristics and features worthy of designation and protection are:

- Original room layout and building perimeter plan;
- Location, size and designs of the doors and windows;
- Exterior stucco finish and the accompanying wood trim;
- Roofline and chimneys;
- Location and elevation of the building with the ground floor just above ground level;
- Interior painted wood trim, moulding, doors, painted wood floors, and dados;
- Door latches, hinges, and builder's hardware throughout;
- Lathe and plaster interior finish; and
- Wooden window sash.