

341 MAIN STREET, PICTON



"Wexford": original verandah pictured here c. 1910, was much lighter in appearance than its replacement. This photograph also shows the original front sash, converted into French windows with fanlights in the c. 1917 alterations. (Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Walker)

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"Wexford" c. 1883

Colton/Walker House

341 Main Street

In some ways the house built by Dr. W. W. Colton, dubbed "Wexford" by later occupants, was quite old-fashioned. It is unusual for a house of the 1880s to display a symmetrical front and even more remarkable is the design of the doorcase, whose glazing echoes (perhaps in later imitation) the pattern of transoms and side-lights of the 1830s. As a whole, the house has a conservative, solid look which suggests an earlier date than the whimsical gables of the Merrill House next door, but it is in fact about five years later.

Despite its conventional form, the house abounds in details at their peak in the eighties. The panelled cornice, for instance, can be found on dozens of houses of the period, but here it is given added emphasis by using pairs of oversized brackets. Similarly, the two-storey bay window on the side elevation was a popular feature

at the time and the massive twin-flue chimneys were still considered in style.¹³ Far more unusual are the French windows with fanlights which open to the verandah, but these are a later change.

The porch itself is a replacement, possibly constructed about the turn of the century when the interior underwent extensive renovations. It has characteristic stout pillars here twinned on tall brick pedestals. Until recently the upstairs round headed-door (imitating the French windows below) opened to a balustraded balcony.

After the death of her physician husband, Diantha Colton married a veterinarian, James G. McPherson.

A most unflattering account of domestic life at the McPhersons appeared in the *Picton Gazette*:

**Results of Drunken Frenzy*

Between 12 and 1 o'clock Monday last, Chief Babbit was notified that a disturbance was in progress at the residence of Mrs. McPherson. Word was conveyed to him by young Mr. Colton, son of Mrs. McPherson, with the request that there be no delay. On entering the house it was found that Prof. McPherson, maddened by drink, had seriously assaulted young Colton. It appears that the Prof. came home about midnight, in a drunken frenzy and began at once to assault the members of the household. The enraged man vented his spite upon young Colton, who had attempted to shield his mother and the servant from the fury of the unnatural stepfather . . . A severe scuffle ensued . . . and the result was that the Prof. stepped out, dodged arrest and left for pastures new.¹⁴

Diantha sold the house in 1891 and it has had a number of distinguished owners since. Perhaps they have been attracted to the building's picturesque setting adjacent to the Anglican church. The house is an important component of the interesting arrangement of historic buildings on Main Street East.



"Wexford" as it appeared c. 1977 with its balcony in place. (Courtesy Dave Mercer)



"Wexford", the Colton/Walker House today, still a major component of the Main East neighbourhood.