

92-01 & 94-83

Ottawa, Ontario

East and West Memorial Buildings

284 & 344 Wellington Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The East and West Memorial Buildings were constructed in 1950-54 and 1954-58 respectively. The East Memorial Building originally housed the Department of Veterans Affairs while the West Memorial Building housed various government departments, including the Department of Trade and Commerce. Public Works Canada is the custodian department. See FHBRO Building Report 92-01. A separate report was not prepared for the East Memorial Building).

Reasons for Designation

The East and West Memorial Buildings were designated Classified because of their significant historical associations, their architectural design and their environmental significance.

These buildings were erected as the federal government's principal memorial to those killed during World War II. They were also major components in the comprehensive master plan developed for the capital by the internationally known planner and architect Jacques Gréber. As such, their construction marked the beginning of a new stage in Ottawa's development as the capital of Canada. They also completed the transition of Wellington Street from mixed small-scale residential and commercial use to monumental buildings housing government functions.

Beyond their status within an ambitious urban plan, the buildings are an architectural achievement in their own right. One of the best designs by the Toronto architectural firm of Allward and Gouinlock, they are an excellent example of Classical-Moderne design incorporating features developed in the 1930s and 1940s. The axial symmetry of the buildings' siting recalls Beaux-Arts design principles, which are also evident in the interior planning, where major and minor axis corridors are arranged around lightwells. The East Memorial Building houses three commemorative mural paintings by three noted Canadian artists: Charles Comfort, André-Charles Biéler, and George Pepper.

The Memorial Buildings make a strong contribution to the character of both Wellington and Sparks Streets, effectively defining the western extremity of the downtown core. Together with the memorial colonnade that links the buildings over Lyon Street, they are a prominent Ottawa landmark. Their monumental permanence is appropriate to their memorial function and to the character of Wellington Street.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the East and West Memorial Buildings resides in their monumental scale and massing, architectural design, materials and craftsmanship, and site relationships.

While the overall impression of the buildings is of two identical structures framing the memorial colonnade over Lyon Street, there are subtle differences at the exterior elevations and in some of the finish materials and detailing. The design has strong Modern Classical elements, including stepped volumes, flattened detail, tall shallow piers between windows, and an overall austerity. References to classical design are seen in the subtle articulation of base, shaft and entablature, the stylized Greek fretwork, and the suggestion of metopes and triglyphs in the cornice. The battened copper roof is a streamlined, modernized version of the Chateau-style roofs favoured by then Prime Minister Mackenzie King. All these elements identify the buildings as very good examples of Classical-Moderne design and should be protected.

The Memorial buildings are characterized by the quality of their materials and construction. The steel and reinforced concrete structures are clad in smooth-faced Indiana limestone with a plinth of Stanstead granite from Québec. Bas-relief masonry sculpture depicting Canadian iconography - indigenous people, fauna, and flora - warrants careful treatment and protection. The steel windows with horizontally-pivoted ventilators have considerable aesthetic significance and are an essential feature of the building's character. Bronzework such as the entrance doors and geometric grillwork is an important decorative element enlivening an otherwise austere exterior. Every effort should be made to preserve original materials, and to consult appropriate specialists for any work affecting the masonry, windows, architectural metalwork and copper roofing.

Classical Beaux-Arts inspiration is evident in the organization of the interior of each building, with entrances at the four corners, and offices organized along major and minor axes and around two lightwells. This general configuration should continue to be respected. Skylights in the lightwells should be reinstated if possible.

Interior finishes, detailing and craftsmanship reflect the hierarchical importance of the various spaces, diminishing in richness on upper floors and in less significant spaces. A variety of marbles, often book- and end-matched, clad the floors and dados of the main entrance lobbies, elevator lobbies, and main floor corridors. Significant woodwork elements include the panelling of the former Ministers' suites and the

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East and West Memorial Buildings (Continued)

simple wood veneer doors throughout the buildings. The washrooms, finished with mint green structural glass or ceramic tiles, plain tile flooring, and white porcelain fixtures with chrome accents, are significant design elements requiring careful restoration and protection. Terrazzo, quarry tile, and bordered linoleum flooring treatments should be retained. Other elements of note include the lobby lightfixtures, the brass and porcelain enamel finish of the elevators, and the brass hardware throughout the building. All interior finishes should be investigated and recorded, and original elements, materials and colours incorporated into new work.

Some erosion of the historic fabric has occurred both at the exterior and interior. The heritage character of the building would be enhanced by removing such elements as the exterior flue pipe running the height of the building. At the interior, the introduction of suspended tile ceilings and security checkpoints, the blocking of entrance doors and other inappropriate alterations have compromised heritage character and should be removed or reworked. Any future refurbishment projects should aim to reinstate original volumes, utilize only compatible materials, and remove all inappropriate alterations.

The three mural paintings depicting post-war activities of veterans are significant commemorative elements of the East Memorial Building. The murals should remain in this building as they were specifically commissioned for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Memorial Buildings' prominence in the urban context is expressed in their strong visual relationship with the Lyon Street colonnade, the built environment of Wellington and Sparks Streets and the open modernist plaza to the west. These relationships should be protected and maintained, as should views of the ensemble as a whole. Any development should be predicated on an understanding of each building as part of a balanced, symmetrical ensemble.

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Revised