

Winnipeg, Manitoba
Customs Examining Warehouse
145 McDermot Avenue

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Customs Examining Warehouse was built in 1907-08 by the Department of Public Works, under Chief Architect David Ewart. It currently serves as a storage facility. The Department of Public Works is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 88-52.

Reasons For Designation

The building was designated Recognized as a result of its historic associations, its architectural merit and its unchanged urban site.

The Customs Examining Warehouse is associated historically with an increase in activity at the port of Winnipeg and an expansion of the city. The 1907 Tariff Policy led to a significant increase in the level of customs' activity and a need for expanded facilities. By the time the Warehouse was built in 1908, Winnipeg was the third-largest grossing port in Canada. Both the site and the style for the new building were carefully chosen to reflect its importance. Located in the new warehouse and commercial area of the city, the building represented Winnipeg's growing stature at that time.

The Customs Examining Warehouse is a very good example of the Renaissance Revival form of the Commercial Style developed in Chicago in the 1880s. The building, on its unchanged site, retains the character of commercial buildings from the period, as does the Exchange District in which it is found.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Customs Examining Warehouse is defined by its architectural style, its functional design and its unaltered commercial setting. The Renaissance Revival style was derived from the design of the Italian palazzo. The tripartite division of the palazzo façade into a rusticated base, piano nobile and cornice is characteristic of the style as expressed in commercial buildings.

In the Customs Examining Warehouse, the style is expressed in the composition and detailing of the façades. The building is a four-storey, flat-roofed, rectangular structure, brick-clad, with a stone foundation and a galvanized metal cornice. Each façade receives the same treatment, with the tripartite arrangement of the façade clearly articulated. The first-storey base, with large round-arched doors and windows, projects

Customs Examining Warehouse (Continued)

slightly and is divided from the above section by a wide stone band. The three-storey middle section has paired rectangular windows, separated by full height pilasters giving vertical emphasis. The uppermost section is composed of a large entablature and projecting cornice. As is typical of the Renaissance Revival style, the detailing is classical - keystones, string course and wide band in stone, modillioned cornice and a rusticated stone foundation.

The building was designed to be fireproof, as required by its function as a warehouse and storage facility. The floors are of reinforced concrete, the stairs are of iron and stone, and the frame is of fireproofed steel. A generous number of elevators were provided to permit ease of circulation. A program of inspection and maintenance of both the interior and exterior building fabric should be instituted if not already established.

The structure remains essentially unchanged on its original site. In addition, the Exchange District of Winnipeg has retained its turn-of-the-century character. The Customs Examining Warehouse is one of a number of buildings in similar style, scale, material, and function from that time. However, the district has recently become a centre for theatre, shopping and dining, as a result of adaptive reuse of some of the buildings. In view of these changes, it would be appropriate for the Warehouse to continue its historic function as an office/storage facility if possible.

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