

FHBRO Number 91-1 50

St. Thomas, Ontario

Armoury

Chester and Wilson Streets

The St. Thomas Armoury was constructed in 1901-02. The compact planning follows a standard American Armoury typology and was designed by the Chief Architects Branch, Department of Public Works under T.W. Fuller. The building continues to serve as an armoury. Alterations include the addition of metal fire exits. The Department of National Defence is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 91-1 50.

Reasons For Designation

The St. Thomas Armoury was designated Recognized because of its architectural importance and its environmental significance as well as its historical associations

The armoury is a simple gable-roofed form which has a visually complex profile because of the round, crenellated corner towers which also reflect military origins of the design. The building relies on dramatic textural and material contrasts and elaboration of details to enliven the facades. It features a good functional design. The large unobstructed drill hall with exposed all metal Fink trusses is the most distinctive space in the structure.

The armoury is prominent in the town because of its substantial scale and its high standards of design and construction. The building is located on the edge of the central business district and is compatible with the adjacent mixed-use area. The armoury has a strong local presence through its continued use for community activities.

The construction of the armoury is associated with the pre-World War I armoury building campaign and the reform and expansion of the volunteer militia. It reflects a government policy to allow the supply of arms to all rural militias, following public debate supporting good local training facilities.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the St. Thomas Armoury resides in its overall form, proportions, construction materials, military architectural details, interior planning and volumes, and site relationships.

The compact massing of the two-storey structure is comprised of a rectangular form with a gable roof, with two crenellated circular towers at one end and a projecting

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frontispiece at the other end. The roof profile with crenellated towers and chimneys behind creates a pleasing composition of forms. The symmetrical form of the structure is accented by a strong rhythm created by the pattern of large square-headed windows joined by stone stringcourses, which contribute to the visual richness of the facades.

The prominence of the building derives from the simple detailing of the well-scaled facades. They are executed in smooth red brick, with carved elements and smooth or rough-faced limestone detailing providing material, colour and textural contrast. The brick work is simply detailed, while the stonework features crenellations, carved details like the brackets at the gable buttresses by the troop door, and the inscribed panels in the upper gables which reflect the military style. The heavy base, stringcourses, and carved coping reinforce the solid, compact appearance of the building. These details should be respected. The addition of asymmetrically-located steel escape stairs on both symmetrical gable ends is a modern intervention that introduces an inappropriate material and design. The character of the building would be enhanced by addressing exit requirements in a more integrated manner which does not detract from the building.

The large round-arched windows on the gable ends and the paired windows down the sides are characteristic features indicating the large open second floor interiors. The vertical sliding sashes of the windows appear to follow precedent, but the visual richness of the traditional frame and sash profiles are greatly simplified and glazed areas are increased particularly at the transoms. Traditional wood sash with their relatively heavy members and smaller muntin subdivisions would contribute a prominent fine-scale pattern to the window openings. At the end of their life, historic research should be used to determine appropriate window replacements. The wood panel and multi-paned glazing of the entrance doors contribute to heritage character. The troop doors are contemporary metal doors devoid of visual detail and smaller than the original door openings, requiring an unsatisfactory make-up panel. At the end of their life, they should be replaced with doors sympathetic with the design of the building.

The armoury is characterized by the large open volume of the top floor hall, with exposed steel trusses and extensive glazing. The spatial openness and bright, well lit character of the hall should be maintained. Typical utilitarian interior finishes should be documented and respected.

The simple ground plane of either turfgrass or asphalt paving should be maintained to protect the stark relationship with the building.

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For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.
