

FHBRO Number 84-27

Ottawa, Ontario

**United States Chancery** (United States Embassy)  
100 Wellington Street

The United States Chancery in Ottawa, constructed 1931-1932, was designed by New York architect Cass Gilbert. Ownership of the building transferred to the Canadian government in 1997. Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 84-27.

### **Reasons For Designation**

The United States Chancery was designated Classified for its architectural importance, its historical associations and its environmental significance.

A very fine example of United States government architecture of the early 1930s, the US Chancery, executed in the Beaux-Arts style, is one of the most refined examples of its type in Canada and an important late work of US architect Cass Gilbert. This building features a simple rectilinear form, classically designed elevations of pale Indiana limestone wrapping around the principal symmetrical entrance and side elevations, a flat roof, and a set-back penthouse. The front and side elevations and principal internal spaces are particularly distinguished for their highly refined proportions, classical composition, high quality details and clean lines. Externally and internally the design employs a simple palette of high quality materials expressing the importance and prestige appropriate to a United States chancery.

Historically this was the first permanent home of the US Legation in Canada, the first foreign mission at Ottawa, and thus a benchmark in Canada's gradual assumption of sovereignty over foreign affairs. It was also one of the first series of purpose-built chancery buildings constructed by the United States government around the world, signifying the rise and establishment of the USA as a leading world power.

Occupying a prominent site opposite the Queen's Gate to Parliament Hill, the US Chancery respects and harmoniously reinforces the highly visible Wellington Street edge of the Hill and is a distinguished landmark feature of the Parliamentary precinct.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the US Chancery resides in its highly refined Beaux-Arts style massing, planning, elevations, details, materials and surviving original interiors, and in its site relationships.

With a rectilinear footprint, flat roof, and symmetrical composition centred on the main entrance of the principal elevation, this building possesses a simple, imposing cube-like

---

FHBRO Number 84-27

Ottawa, Ontario

**United States Chancery** (United States Embassy)

100 Wellington Street

massing. At roof level the set-back service core penthouse is partially obscured by a stone parapet balustrade running around the Indiana limestone front and side elevations. A secondary side entrance is located on the west elevation. The form, massing, symmetrical design and principal front and side limestone-finished elevations and penthouse, roof profile and silhouette are important aspects of the overall character of the building. The prominence of the principal entrance should be retained.

The principal front and side elevations of the chancery, including those of the penthouse and the front boundary wall with its gate posts to the sides, designed in the Beaux-arts classical style and finished in limestone, are particularly fine. Modelled on Italian palazzos and employing classical architectural proportions, orders and finely carved details, the facades demonstrate very careful attention to design and high standards of workmanship. These facades, including masonry finishes, iron balcony railings, and metal flagposts, should be respected and maintained and receive conservation expertise for repairs.

The original multipaned double-hung sash windows and wood entrance doors of the principle facades survive and are important character-defining features.

Signage should be discreet and of appropriate high quality materials and finishes, designed to complement, and not compete with, the architectural design and finishes of the building.

Internally the building maintains its Beaux-Arts circulation spaces, including ceremonial hallways and stairs which lead to the principal offices, together with corridors accessing offices of secondary importance, and more functionally treated corridors and stairs leading to the support offices and spaces. The planning, volumes and level of decorative treatment relating to the original hierarchical ordering of these spaces and stairs, and the rooms to which they lead, contribute to the heritage value of the interior. The elevator is particularly fine, including doors, surrounds, and controls at all floor levels, and the elevator cabin with its wood finishes, trim, controls and light fixture.

A number of rooms were designed with high quality interiors, including the ground floor vestibule, entrance hall and grand staircase, the first floor hall with its encircling corridor and Ambassador's office, and the second floor former library which, although subdivided, retains its original walls and finishes. These rooms retain intact their original interiors, and merit conservation. Any future second floor replanning should consider

---

---

FHBRO Number 84-27

Ottawa, Ontario

**United States Chancery** (United States Embassy)

100 Wellington Street

reinstatement of the original plan, volume and finishes of the library. Original Chancery furnishings should be identified and maintained in situ if possible.

At ground, first, and second floors, the regular offices differ in scale and finish according to the hierarchy of the intended occupants. In these offices all original interior finishes merit retention. Suspended ceilings reducing original volumes and concealing original finishes should not be permitted. Piping, cabling and sockets should be concealed or discreetly positioned. Original light fixtures should be identified and conserved. The washrooms generally retain their original layouts, doors, fixtures, tiled floor and wall finishes, and contribute to heritage character.

This building was designed to fit harmoniously within a row of similarly scaled and finished buildings, all of which faced onto the Parliament Hill precinct. The Chancery's principal facades, front masonry wall with iron railings, entrance and side door steps, and gate posts with decorative iron arches and light fixtures all contribute positively to the surrounding ceremonial context. Any development to the rear, or on adjacent vacant sites, should relate harmoniously with the building and not overwhelm or engulf it. In particular the detached character, set-back from the street and original side boundaries, massing, height, roofline, materials and design quality of the Chancery should be respected and conserved.

1998.07.20

Revised

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

---