

**Union Bank Building**  
128 Wellington Street

**HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The Union Bank Building was built in 1887-88 to the designs of Ottawa architect F. J. Alexander. The building is currently owned by the United States Embassy, and is soon to be acquired by the National Capital Commission. See FHBRO Building Report 84-28.

**Reasons for Designation**

The Union Bank Building was designated Recognized because of its historical associations and environmental significance, and also because of its architectural integrity. The Union Bank represents the last vestige of Wellington Street's late 19th century status as Bankers' Row, when its south side was lined with richly ornamented banks, clubs and financial institutions in the Second Empire and Richardsonian Romanesque styles. Since the turn of the century, the older financial institutions have gradually been replaced with much larger government office buildings that are predominantly Beaux-Arts in style. As such, the Union Bank Building provides a tangible link with Wellington Street's commercial past and is a physical record of the earlier building typologies which once characterized it. A unique yet compatible element of the streetscape lining the Ceremonial Route, the building also has a historical link with the Parliamentary Precinct by virtue of its architect, who designed the fence enclosing Parliament Hill and the interior of the Library of Parliament.

**Character Defining Elements**

The Union Bank Building is a robust example of the Romanesque Revival style executed in New Brunswick yellow sandstone. The three storey facade combines smooth and rock-faced masonry units laid with fine mortar joints, and is richly articulated. At street level, three large vousoired arches contain windows and an offset entrance. The upper storeys are detailed with low-relief sculptural plant motifs, and culminate in the lively roofline with its central pediment and abbreviated corner turrets. The tripartite symmetry of the facade, the glazing pattern within the masonry arches and the distinctive roofline are character-defining features that should not be compromised. The east (side) elevation is of Flemish bond brick, with sandstone belt courses and window lintels. A fine stone chimney stack pierces the flat roof at the east side.

Although the masonry is generally in good repair, the lower courses of sandstone exhibit some erosion and discoloration which may be caused by de-icing salts used on

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the sidewalk and front steps. Repairs executed in cement-rich parging are inappropriate for both aesthetic and technical reasons. Repointing must respect the composition and appearance of the original fine mortarjoints. Where original windows and frames remain they should be retained and repaired, and existing metal windows replaced with historically correct units. The front door, casing and transom are extant and should be preserved.

The interior has been altered and modernized. However certain original features have survived: the entrance vestibule retains its simple marble wainscot panels, and the rich woodwork of the ground floor banking offices and staircase are intact. Restoring these features and incorporating them into any future development of the interior would improve the building's overall coherence.

In the late 19th century, the Union Bank fit comfortably into a streetscape of four storey structures which were in keeping with its modest scale. It is now cheek-by-jowl with the 12-storey Victoria Building to the west, and flanked on the other side by a large parking lot with a high metal security fence. It is compatible with the character of the Parliamentary Precinct, and was constructed contemporaneously with the nearby Langevin Block (1883-88), which is also of New Brunswick sandstone. Its robust facade contributes significantly to the architectural interest of the streetscape facing the Ceremonial Route.

Historic photographs indicate the presence of an arcaded passageway at the Union Bank's west sideyard. Retention of a sideyard at this location would provide the opportunity for an arcade link with Sparks Street, and preserve the visibility of the building's fine corner quoining, brick sidewall and stone chimney stack.

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