

Ottawa, Ontario
Bank of Nova Scotia
125 Sparks Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Bank of Nova Scotia, Ottawa, was built in 1924-25 to designs by John M. Lyle, architect, of Toronto. It was acquired by Public Works Canada in 1973, and has been vacant since 1985. See FHBRO Building Report 85-08.

Reason for Designation

On June 2, 1986, the Bank of Nova Scotia was designated Classified because it is a superior work of architecture, one of the best designs by a nationally significant architect, and because of its positive contribution to the character of Sparks Street.

John M. Lyle was a Beaux Arts trained architect much admired by his peers. He is best remembered for his vigorous call for the development of a Canadian ornamental vocabulary within the Beaux Arts style. In his several buildings for the Bank of Nova Scotia, Lyle pursued this idea with carved representations of Canadian wildlife and allegorical sculpture of Canadian industry. His Ottawa bank is the most rigorously Classical of these buildings: its Doric order respects archaeological precedent and much of the rest of the ornamental scheme is intended to be Doric, at least in spirit. The composition of the façade, of course, is distinctly Beaux Arts, borrowing as much from Roman and Renaissance precedent as from the Greek. This composition is remarkable in its lucid proportions, and achieves an overall simplicity despite its fairly generous array of festoons and cornucopia. The architect's effort to Canadianize his architecture is less evident, and less painful, in this design than in his later works.

Much of the interior of the building is occupied by a generous banking hall; mezzanine offices overlook this central space. The banking hall was lit by a coloured-glass skylight; its walls were relieved with murals of scenes from Canadian life. The Greek inspiration of the building extended to the design of its fittings and furniture. In 1957, the splendours of this space were seriously diminished by the installation of an indifferent luminous ceiling; its original fittings have mostly disappeared.

Character Defining Elements

The whole of the Sparks Street façade of this building, including all windows, doors, and architectural metals, and the general volumes of its interior are essential to its architectural and historical character. The relative opacity of this façade is fundamental to the original architectural intent, and was expressive of its original use. Any attempt to make this façade more transparent would be an affront to the building.

Ottawa, Ontario

Bank of Nova Scotia (Continued)

General interior volumes and surviving ornament should be preserved and perhaps restored. (One can hope that the skylight survives above the luminous ceiling.) The best care of this building would result from a use being found which can be fitted to its existing spaces. Failing this, the building is valuable enough that any changes made must be readily reversible. Heritage doctrine requires that the new be kept quite distinct from the old; the character of the interior of this building is strong enough that it may respond well to a literal reading of this doctrine.

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