

## HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

### SUMMARY

This building (formerly the Union Bank Building) was built in 1911-13 by Howe, Harwood and Sutherland, contractors, to the designs of W.E. Noffke, an Ottawa architect. It was Recognized because it is a very good example of the development of the community, and its very good functional design.

### HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

This building is one of 19 buildings located on the north side of Sparks Street between Elgin and Bank streets, an area which has been, since the 1880s at least, the core of Ottawa's central business district. It was built in three sections between 1911 and 1913, but its design dates to 1907 when the Ottawa entrepreneurs Robert and Russell L. Blackburn commissioned W.E. Noffke to design a seven-storey hotel for a Metcalfe Street site. Problems with land title and termination of leases in existing buildings led to delays in construction and, over time, the project expanded to the final result: a ten-storey combined hotel, retail and office block which, when finished, was the largest non-governmental office building in Ottawa. It was the city's grandest and most ambitious commercial building project, and reflected the prominent place of the Blackburns in the city's commercial life. In planning, it was the earliest of Ottawa's highrise tower developments, and though it was much lower than skyscrapers built in Toronto and Montreal, it stood as the preeminent, large-scale example of highrise tower development within the local context, and a notable representative in the Canadian context. The historical importance of the Blackburn Building appears to rest with its connection with the prominent local family, the Blackburns, its early date of conception, its great scale in the local context and its role, for most of its history, as a rental office for various federal government departments.

### ARCHITECTURE

This is a large ten-storey office building of reinforced concrete on the Kahn system. Its complex exterior reflects both the impact of its three-stage building process and the initially tentative quality of decoration of tall buildings with large areas of glass. Its main elevations consist of a three-part composition capped by a boldly projecting aluminum (originally bronze) cornice. It begins with a two-storey base faced with Stanstead granite, its verticals taking the form of modernized columns between which were placed large expanses of glass. A projecting sub-cornice forms the base for a five-storey section of undecorated Bedford stone punctuated by extensive glazing. The seventh-storey windows are arched (at one time they were the final storey) and several are decorated with elaborate balconies. A second sub-cornice forms the base for the terminating three-storey section, which consists of two rows of rectangular glazing and

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a final storey of oversized round-headed openings. All window frames and canopies were of bronze as well; these are now aluminum, except at the ground floor where copper has been used. Several major alterations have been made to the exterior: all of the ground-floor storefronts have been modified; a new staircase was constructed in an interior light-well; the bronze windows were replaced with aluminum; a new fascia and cornice were installed; and textured granolux panels were applied to the entire ground floor and to the upper-storey spandrels.

#### ENVIRONMENT

Located on an important intersection, the Blackburn Building is a large-scale, relatively elaborate and familiar structure, which has been a place of work or business for many Ottawans.

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