

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

SUMMARY

This building (originally called the Canadian Bank of Commerce) was built in 1922 by G.C. Graves Construction Company to the designs of Darling and Pearson, Toronto architects. It was Recognized because of its very good design, its excellent craftsmanship and because its setting reinforces the present character of the area. It is also a familiar landmark in the neighbourhood.

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. The Canadian Bank of Commerce, in Ottawa since 1874, quickly emerged as the preeminent financial organization in the city's commercial development for it took a special interest in the development of the timber and lumber trade. Originally, the bank purchased a building along "Bankers' Row" on Wellington Street for business purposes, but along with other companies, moved to Sparks Street after World War One. The Commerce purchased property late in 1920, demolished the block of stores already there, and built the present structure which has been the bank's main branch in Ottawa since its opening.

ARCHITECTURE

Darling and Pearson prepared plans for many banking companies throughout their partnership, but clearly their work for the Canadian Bank of Commerce was the most important. The building features a colossal Beaux-Arts facade consisting of a symmetrical elevation composed of a rusticated base, a row of monumentally scaled columns and an entablature with capping parapet, all executed in smooth Indiana limestone. This fronted what was actually a combined banking hall and office building. The most important space was the banking hall, which continued the restrained dignity of the facade. Lit by a skylight, it featured a stone dado with plaster above, a groined ceiling picked out in gold leaf, with plaster medallions in the form of historical coinage. The floors were of Tennessee marble, the tellers' cages and public desks of Belgian marble and bronze. The board and banking room were lined and furnished in mahogany while the other rooms were of oak.

ENVIRONMENT

Since its construction, this has been one of Sparks Street's most important buildings, both for the quality of its design and for its function. The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce is among the most active financial institutions in downtown Ottawa, and its Ottawa main branch appears to reflect that status.

June 13, 1986