

Ottawa, Ontario
Wellington Building
180 Wellington Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Wellington Building (formerly the Metropolitan Life Assurance Building) was built in 1925-27 to designs by D. Everett Waid, architect, of New York; J.A. Ewart, Ottawa, associated architect. In 1957-58 two storeys were added to the original building, and in 1958-59 a six storey wing was added to the east, both to designs by Marani and Morris, architects, Toronto. Public Works Canada is the custodian of the building. See FHBRO Building Report 85-31.

Reason for Designation

In January, 1987, the building was designated Recognized because of its sophisticated Beaux Arts design and its environmental importance. It is valuable both for its strong contribution to the formality of Wellington Street opposite Parliament, and for the sensitivity to the modest commercial proportions of Sparks Street visible in its "back" façade. Historically, the building there of the Canadian headquarters of a large American firm coincides with the emergence of Ottawa as a regional commercial centre. The building was a deliberate example of advanced thinking concerning efficient office planning for clerical "factories" and a concern for health in the workplace.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Wellington Building resides in the whole of its three exposed façades and the original entry sequence and lobby.

The building is a typical Beaux Arts composition with an exposed basement, in granite, with round-headed openings, supporting a giant Corinthian order on the Wellington Street façade, reduced to pilasters on other façades, and bracketed by substantial end bays in smooth limestone with punched windows. The building is entered through three round-headed doors centred on the Wellington façade. This entry was originally announced by a substantial canopy which afforded shelter to pedestrians on Wellington Street. This is a complete, essentially self-contained composition. This containment, expressed for instance in the proportion of wall to window opening, is essential to the heritage character of the building. The present glazing is a simplified and diminished memory of the original, but the subdivision of the windows remains important to the visual effect of the design.

The attic storeys and east wing built in the 1950s are sensitive and unobtrusive designs in a very late Classical mode, and should be respected in their own right.

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Wellington Building (Continued)

Beaux Arts axial planning principles are evident in the sequence of entry spaces -- from vestibule through the arcade to the large central lobby. The general volumes of this original circulation spine remain, although secondary circulation on a cross-axis has been added to serve the new wing. Evidence of these principles are essential to the heritage character of the building and should be retained. These interior spaces received careful embellishment appropriate to the status and solidity of the previous owner, Metropolitan Life. The original surface treatments in the arcade and lobby have been altered and simplified. These spaces contain in allegorical mosaic panels an overt symbolic expression of the company's self-image. The mosaics and other surviving decorative treatments remain as the defining feature of this interior and should be retained.

Outside of the central entry/circulation spine, on the ground and other floors, large, minimally ornamented space were loosely disposed and filled with rigid rows of desks -- an early version of open office landscape. These areas could be managed with some flexibility providing principle patterns of circulation are respected.

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