

Winnipeg, Manitoba
Minto Armoury
Minto Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Minto Armoury was built in 1914-15 to designs by the Department of Public Works under T.W. Fuller. The building continues to serve as a drill hall. The Department of National Defence is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 90-61.

Reasons for Designation

The Minto Armoury was designated Recognized as a result of its environmental qualities, its association with the provision of drill halls for the Active Volunteer Militia under Sam Hughes, and its architectural merit.

The armoury occupies the end of a block, surrounded by streets on three sides, with a vehicle compound at the rear. Constructed concurrently with the development of the west end of Winnipeg, the armoury retains its historic orientation to the residential surroundings, and is a community landmark.

Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia and Defence from 1911 to 1916, expedited the program of armoury construction initiated by Frederick Borden. In the interest of reducing costs, he turned over the design of the majority of armouries to his Engineering Services Branch, leaving only Class A armouries in the hands of the Department of Public Works. The Winnipeg Armoury is one of the few designed by the latter under his auspices.

The Minto Armoury is among the largest armouries constructed before the Second World War, and provides a full range of facilities. The large gable-roofed drill hall is surrounded by a two-storey flat-roofed structure containing armouries, mess hall, lecture rooms and administrative offices. The Tudor Revival style, exemplified by sturdy towers and low arched entrance, is typical of Fuller's designs under Hughes. As a result of design restrictions imposed by the Militia Council in 1909, medieval references and decorative elements are less elaborate than in earlier armouries, but the crenellations and towers continue the fortress motif characteristic of Canadian armouries.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this structure is defined by its external massing and detailing, functional design, high quality materials and craftsmanship, and by the character of the drill hall interior.

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The Winnipeg Armoury exemplifies the monumental massing of Fuller's later designs.

While partial enclosure of the drill hall by the administrative block is characteristic of Fuller's Class A designs, the Winnipeg Armoury is somewhat unusual in that all four facades are treated similarly.

A strong horizontal emphasis, created by contrasting bands of red brick and white stone, is accented by robust three-storey corner towers, square in plan. The low two-storey gate tower which serves as the main entrance continues the linearity of the front facade. The integrity of the massing and profile must be respected.

The exterior facades of the armoury are largely intact. The numerous window openings, arranged singly or grouped in twos or threes, contribute to the liveliness of the elevations. Some of the original multi-paned sash windows have been replaced with modern units not in keeping with the medieval character of the building. When window replacement is required, these should be replaced with units compatible with the original design.

The rusticated stone foundation and the medieval detailing, including string courses, crenellations and window dressings in stone, contrast in colour and texture with the red brick walls. These elements contribute to the texture and monumental quality of the design and must be preserved. Repairs to the masonry should only be undertaken with the assistance of a masonry expert.

The large, unobstructed interior of the drill hall, achieved through the use of steel trusses, is characteristic and must be preserved. All original interior finishes and historic building fabric should be maintained and repaired in kind.

Modifications to the environment include the provision of a vehicular compound at the rear, and additional parking spaces on both sides and across the front of the structure. To provide an unobstructed view of the principal facade, it would be preferable to discourage parking in front of the building.

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