

FHBRO Number 91-1 34

Ottawa, Ontario

Commissariat Building

Ottawa Lockstation

The Commissariat Building was constructed in 1827 to the designs of the Corps of Royal Engineers. During the 1980s the building was restored to its 1840s appearance. The building currently houses the Bytown Museum, and is part of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 91-1 34.

Reasons for Designation

The Commissariat Building has been designated Classified for its important historical associations, its impressive architectural character and its environmental significance.

The construction of the Commissariat Building is directly related to the theme of the military defence strategy for the Canadas in the 1820s and to the evolution of that strategy over time. Having served as a depot for supplying the many construction sites along the Rideau Canal, and as the oldest remaining stone building in Ottawa, it is associated with the military origin and subsequent development of the Rideau waterway and the City of Ottawa.

As the only extant structure on the site dating from the period of construction of the Rideau Canal, the Commissariat Building testifies to the earliest and most significant period of the site's development. The historical and architectural prominence of the building within the Colonel By Valley is greatly increased by virtue of its physical relationship to the valley proper, notably the East Escarpment of Parliament Hill, the Ottawa River, and the other elements of the Ottawa Lockstation including the locks proper and Lockmaster's Building. The site's 19th century circulation patterns were reinstated in the 1990s, using contemporary materials.

The building's balanced proportions and symmetrical elevations lend it a particularly imposing presence, which is strengthened by the visual weight and texture of the masonry walls. The Commissariat Building also displays a distinctly pre-Confederation commercial and industrial character which was emphasized by the restoration of the building to its 1840s configuration. The design of the building balances the functional requirements of a commissariat with a finely balanced composition of window and door openings, testifying to the superior design ability of the Corps of Royal Engineers. The high level of craftsmanship displayed in the masonry walls, constructed by the prominent Montreal contractor Thomas MacKay, reflects the importance placed on the construction of this building on the frontier of Upper Canada.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Commissariat Building resides in its form, proportion, architectural features and materials which contribute to its imposing early commercial character.

The rectangular massing of the three storey building displays a well balanced composition of wall surface to openings, and is covered by a gable roof with cross-axial gables centred on the long elevations. The symmetrical spacing of supply doors and windows and the roughly coursed and textured masonry of the walls reflect the building's original function as a storehouse. The excellent condition and the well-executed masonry detailing of the building testify to skill of its builders. Any intervention which detracts from the form and proportion of the building, or from the symmetrical shape and placement of its openings should be avoided.

The building's interior has undergone several modifications but retains some large storage and smaller office spaces which reflect the period of usage by the military. The evidence of the building's former functions should be respected when considering modifications to the building's interior.

The building's doors and windows are reproductions fabricated during the 1980s restoration of the building to its 1840s appearance and contribute pattern and texture to the elevations. The rough coursing and texture of the masonry walls and the wood shingle roofing are also important character defining elements which should be maintained. Any change to the form, finish or detail of the building, or any departure from the 1980s restoration work, should be based on documentary evidence.

The position of the Commissariat Building within the valley overlooking the northern entrance of the Rideau Canal contributes to its imposing character. Any new landscape elements should respect this position and its direct relationship with the canal locks proper.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.