

FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE
 BUILDING EVALUATION REPORT

File No.2.5.10

I IDENTIFICATION

BUILDING		Ad Hoc FLIBRO (CDA)	
- City/Prov:	CALGARY, Alta.	- Meeting:	84-05
- Name:	Mewata Armoury	- Date:	14 NOV 84
- Address:	801 Eleventh St. S.W.	- BER No	83-82
- Owner:	DND	- Date:	

CHARACTER

Summary

The Mewata Armoury was erected on a convenient site in the downtown business district in 1917-18. It is a large stone-trimmed red brick building executed in the baronial or Tud Gothic style common to most of the Canadian government's pre-1930 armoury/drill halls. The Mewata Armoury was associated with Calgary's military history and continues today as an active militia establishment. It is a substantial, familiar and well-located local landmark declared to be an Alberta Heritage Resource in 1979.

Architecture

The Mewata Armoury was a minor variant on a well-tried architectural theme. Designed in the baronial or Tudor Gothic style, Mewata's rugged battlemented facade conveyed a strong image of solidity and impregnability very appropriate to its military function, principally expressed through four large, square, crenellated, three storey, bastion-like corner towers linked by continuous crenellated exterior walls evocative of the curtain walls of medieval fortifications. This military imagery was reinforced by the building's small narrow windows and by the stylized bartizans, complete with firing slits, that topped the decorative pilastering of the exterior walls. The principal focus of Mewata's main facade is its central entry, further heightened the fortress-like character of the building. This consisted of projecting three-storey crenellated towers flanking a wide low ogee-arched main entrance, joined above by an over-entrance gallery whose original functional purpose would have been a machicolation designed to bring plunging fire to bear on the entry. Collectively, these somewhat stylized fortification features marked Mewata as a somewhat extreme example of the Tudor Gothic style and decorative vocabulary that characterized mid pre-1940s Canadian drill hall and armoury construction.

History

The construction of a major Calgary drill hall was the product of a new attention to the combat readiness, organization and training of the Canadian militia particularly notable in the decade before 1914. The city of Calgary offered various free sites to the federal government but R.B. Bennett, then M.P. for Calgary, strongly favoured its location on the eastern edge of Eowata Park, facing 8th Avenue. While convieted too late to be of practical value during World War I Mewata Armoury has continued as an active military establishment since that time. It was the headquarters for all Calgary militia units from 1918 to 1939, housed a small unit of the Regular Force (B Squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse) from 1920 to 1936 and, during World War II, formed the centre of a substantial training facility. Since 1945 it has accommodated militia and cadet organizations while providing facilities for a great variety of civic organizations. It is the only one of major Alberta armouries still in active military use.

Environment

The Mewata Armoury is an environmentally significant and visually important Calgary landmark, a unique building in a well known central location. This perceived value,

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:reinforced by its 1979 designation as an Alberta Historic Resource, derives from its near downtown location, its prominent siting at the western end of Calgary's principal 8th Avenue commercial thoroughfare and its continuing wide-ranging use for special civic events. Built with its central entry facing the centre of 8th Avenue at the eastern edge of W2wata Park at 11th Street, its location continues to mark the division between the western edge of the downtown and a riverside park belt extending west along the Bow River Niewata thus occupies a significant visual, spatial and architectural niche in the built envcnment of downtown Calgary.