

Ottawa, Ontario
Confederation Building
Wellington Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Confederation Building was completed in 1932 as the first major component of a new federal government precinct in the area west of Parliament Hill. It was designed by the Chief Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works, with official attribution to R.C. Wright, David Ewart, and Thomas Adams. The exterior is virtually unchanged; the interior was rehabilitated in the 1970s to mark a shift from accommodating departmental staff to housing a number of government ministers and members of Parliament. The custodial department is Public Works Canada. See FHBRO Building Reports 87-34 to 87-37.

Reasons for Designation

The Confederation Building was designated a Classified heritage property primarily because of its importance in defining the character of the federal precinct west of Parliament Hill. Its size, siting, and rich architectural detailing have played a key role in extending the vocabulary established by the original Parliament buildings. Its original construction was an important step in the efforts of successive federal governments to transform Ottawa into a worthy national showplace. It continues to have a strong influence on the ambience of the Wellington Street core.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this property is defined primarily by the east and south façades, including the southeast entrance, and by the principle interior lobbies.

The major façades were carefully designed to establish an appropriate "Civil Gothic" vocabulary for new federal government buildings. The rich blending of dormers, turrets, oriels, pavilions and towers, with extensive corbelling and carved detailing in the stonework, created a picturesque silhouette and visual appeal considered particularly appropriate in the Parliament Hill context. It is important that these features be meticulously preserved, and that any restoration be done with careful attention to material and detail.

The other façades, although not as dominant, are also highly visible given the open siting of the building and should be maintained in a consistent way to preserve the integrity of the complex.

The Wellington Street façade displays a variety of carved detailing described in glowing reports at the time of construction as the epitome of "patriotic symbolism."

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Confederation Building (Continued)

The provincial coats of arms, the representation of Canadian occupations, the carvings of Canadian native peoples, Canadian youth, and Canadian wildlife, and the accompanying decorative elements are works of art. Their protection should be entrusted to those with expertise in the conservation of stone carving and sculpture.

For the interior, considerable care was taken in the selection and detailing of material in the principle public areas. Most of the marble, brass, bronze, terrazzo and decorative plasterwork in these areas was preserved and restored during the changes of the 1970s, and they should continue to be carefully maintained. The decorative plasterwork on the frieze and cornice of the ground floor lobby continues the Canadian symbolism of the exterior and warrants particular attention.

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