

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

SUMMARY

The Booth Building (formerly the Booth-Holbrook Building) was built in 1910-11 by Alex. Garvock of Ottawa to the designs of J.A. Ewart, an Ottawa architect. It was Recognized because it is a very good example of the development of the community and because its setting reinforces the present character of the area.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

This building is one of 19 buildings located on the north side of Sparks Street between Elgin and Bank streets, an area which has been, since the 1880s at least, the core of Ottawa's central business district. It is also one of the few in Ottawa which can be associated with the J.R. Booth family of lumber trade fame, their nineteenth century house and mills all having been demolished. One of the founder's sons, c. Jackson Booth, was the most active in the life of the city. His charitable donations gave Ottawa a new YMCA in 1909 (now the Roxborough Hotel) while his civic responsibilities included terms on the Ottawa Improvement Commission (of which he was chairman) and its successor, the Federal District Commission. In business, he focussed on real estate: he purchased several existing downtown office buildings and sponsored the construction of several major downtown office blocks. In 1908 he joined an Ottawa tailor, J.A.H. Holbrook, in financing the Booth Building which represents the gradual withdrawal of the family from an important Canadian industry and the transition of Ottawa from a lumber town in the nineteenth century to a commercial centre in the twentieth.

ARCHITECTURE

The Booth Building is an early example of architects coming to grips with the decorative problems of the new reinforced concrete construction technology. Unlike other highrises along Sparks Street which attempted to mask the structural system with a measure of surface decoration, the Booth Building openly expressed these elements in its simplified treatment of the exterior. The uncluttered facades and linear forms which steel, concrete and extensive glazing inevitably involved resulted in a very simple and repetitive design, fronted with Ohio sandstone on the upper floors and marble along the ground floor. Though few changes have been made to the facade above the ground floor (only the cornice has been replaced), the ground-floor shopfronts have all been altered.

ENVIRONMENT

This building is taller than its neighbours, so that, in spite of its midblock location, it is an imposing structure. Used as government offices during much of its career, it reinforces the present character of the area.

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