

Kingston, Ontario
Custom House
294 King Street East

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Kingston Custom House was built in 1856-59 by the Province of Canada to designs by the Montreal firm of Hopkins, Lawford and Nelson. It is now owned by Public Works Canada. See FHBRO Building Report 85-35.

Reason for Designation

On May 23, 1986, the building was classified because of its fine design and execution and the survival intact of its historical siting. In 1972 the Custom House was designated a national architectural site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. It is designated a heritage structure by the City of Kingston, under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Custom House is a rich example of Neoclassical public architecture, skillfully executed in Kingston limestone. It continues to share its site with the contemporary former Kingston Post Office, (also classified by FHBRO and designated a national architectural site by the HSMBC, and a heritage building by the City of Kingston) and with a contemporary stone stable building.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this property is defined primarily by its intact Neoclassical public façades, but additionally by the presence of two contemporary public structures on the site. The symmetry and regularity of the Neoclassical design is still clear in the simple, balanced composition of the façades and the uniformity of the round-headed openings. Neither additions nor changes should be contemplated that would in any way destroy this balanced composition. While regular, this is an enriched design, as is evident in the channelled masonry of the base storey as well as in the stone detailing associated with the parapet, cornice and openings. Careful maintenance of these exterior features should continue.

While the continued use and continued perception of this as a public building has helped maintain its exterior character, it has not, regrettably, preserved the original sequence of ground floor public spaces (portico-vestibule-hall-corridor-long room) that facilitated the collection of customs from the 1850's to 1951, when alterations moved the long room to the upper storey.

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Kingston, Ontario

Custom House (Continued)

The heritage character of this building is enhanced by its site. An urban park (federally owned and maintained as a park by the city since 1903) between the Custom House and the Post Office continues the tradition of the fenced garden that once separated the two buildings. Efforts should be made to preserve this park in a layout and with materials which closely interpret the site's history and, retain existing and replace missing fence and parapet elements.

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