

Ottawa, Ontario
Institut Jeanne d'Arc
489 Sussex Drive

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The five 19th century commercial structures comprising what is now the Institut Jeanne d'Arc were constructed between 1846 and 1876, when Sussex Drive was at the centre of Ottawa's commercial activity. The Sisters of the Institut Jeanne d'Arc acquired the properties one by one from 1917 to 1926, and converted them into a single building. The property has been owned by the National Capital Commission since 1980. See FHBRO Building Report 85-39.

Reasons for Designation

The Institut Jeanne d'Arc was designated Recognized because of its historical associations, its architectural significance, and its environmental value.

The buildings are typical of the commercial structures which appeared on Sussex Drive during its mid 19th century boom. They have been associated with businessmen and professionals who had offices in them, and with tenants who occupied the residential flats on the upper floors. The buildings are also associated with the Sisters of the Institut Jeanne d'Arc, who operated a boarding house for young working women from 1917 to 1989. The Order was founded by Mère Thomas d'Aquin, a French Dominican sister who arrived in Ottawa from France in the second decade of the 20th century. The Institut is also closely associated with the local development and social life of Lowertown Ottawa.

Architecturally, the Institut Jeanne d'Arc is an excellent example of commercial architecture dating from Ottawa's Confederation period. Built in two phases, from 1846 to 1851 and from 1870 to 1876, the five buildings reflect changing architectural tastes. Nevertheless, a uniformity of size and scale combined with a conservative approach to style resulted in a harmonious row of 19th century commercial buildings.

The buildings at 489 Sussex Drive, together with buildings on the other blocks between Rideau and St. Patrick Streets, are among Ottawa's oldest extant commercial buildings. They contribute to the 19th century character of the east side of the street.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Institut Jeanne d'Arc resides in the scale, the proportions, the fenestration pattern, the footprint, the materials, and the exterior architectural details of the five buildings which comprise the Institut. The three buildings at the

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south end of the block are constructed in limestone and share classically inspired proportions and rhythms. Constructed with rough-faced stone with a small amount of dressed stone detailing, the buildings rely on their good building materials and pleasing proportions for effect.

Influenced by the Neoclassical style, their tripartite elevations consist of a ground storey, differentiated from the upper storeys by a greater use of dressed stone and separated from them by a wide stringcourse, and two upper storeys composed of rows of regularly spaced, multipaned, rectangular windows. The windows create a unifying horizontal rhythm across the three facades, and are emphasized by dressed stone surrounds or by stone sills. The corners are finished with quoins.

The Johnston building, the second building from the south corner, is the most sophisticated of the three. The facade has a unified design which takes into account the width of the shop window on the ground floor. The doors with fanlights and the brackets beneath the window sills point to the Neoclassical origins of the design.

However, the tall, narrow proportions of the building, the exaggerated keystones above the doors and the segmental arches above some of the windows, suggest that architectural styles of non-classical origin have also influenced the design.

The two buildings running south from Clarence Street are constructed of a light brown brick. The use of brick rather than stone gives the facades a lighter appearance in comparison to the earlier buildings. The rhythm across the facade is more lively and is matched by a second vertical rhythm, created by tall slender pilasters which reach the full height of the building. The windows have segmental arches, and originally the doorways were positioned off-centre.

Any new work should respect the scale, proportions, rhythm and fenestration pattern of the existing buildings. Reinstatement of shop fronts on Sussex Drive, based on the original store front configurations, would enhance the commercial character of the street. The masonry work contributes to the character of the buildings. Any work on the masonry should therefore be done in consultation with a conservation specialist.

While the interior has undergone major modifications, the definition of the basic plan of the five buildings is still legible in the thick dividing walls and back walls, the variation of floor levels, and the floor to ceiling relationships in the different buildings. The legibility of the individual buildings should be respected in future renovations.