

Kitchener, Ontario
Federal Building
15 Duke Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Federal Building in Kitchener, Ontario was built in 1937-38 to designs of the Department of Public Works. It is the property of Public Works Canada. See FHBRO Building Report 89-89.

Reasons for Designation

The Federal building was designated Recognized because of its historical importance in Kitchener's development, its architectural integrity, and its relationship to the surrounding environment.

Historically, the building is significant as one of a number of Federal Buildings constructed following the Public Works Construction Act (1934) designed to stimulate the economy during the Depression and to relieve unemployment. In the local development of Kitchener, construction of the building marked a time when this industrial city was beginning to make a modest recovery, stimulating demand for improved customs and postal facilities and for a permanent location for the Department of Defence and the Marine Department.

Architecturally, the building is typical of the modern classicism used extensively by Public Works during this period. Like many other Federal Buildings across the country, no single individual is credited with its design. However, it reflects Public Works' high standards for well-built, carefully laid-out buildings and quality workmanship.

The building's environmental value lies primarily in the fact that its site has remained relatively unchanged since construction. The addition of the War Memorial (moved from City Hall to the adjacent Frederick Street Park) and a ramp for the handicapped have been well-handled, and integrate well with the site. The Federal Building is one of a few prominent and architecturally interesting buildings in the neighbourhood and continues to occupy a major downtown location.

Character Defining Elements

The Federal Building's architectural character resides primarily in its compositional harmony and the durability of its carefully chosen materials. The two-storey structure is a handsome example of modern classicism, its simple and fundamental post and lintel system the dominant compositional device on a strictly symmetrical facade.

.../2

Kitchener, Ontario
Federal Building (Continued)

Classical features include the projecting centre section and its projecting entry bays and the horizontal emphasis given by layers of stone receding back to the roofline, set above a series of strong verticals.

The reinforced concrete structure is faced with granite on the exposed basement, with limestone on the three principal facades, and with brick on the rear facade. Interior flooring materials of marble in the entrance vestibule, lobbies, stairs and thresholds, terrazzo in the public spaces, and linoleum and hardwood flooring in working spaces, were common to contemporary public buildings, as was the terra cotta hollow tile for interior partitions. Their high quality, typical of this era of Public Works buildings, is apparent in the few changes required since.

Significant external decorative features include the geometric motifs in the horizontal band which serves as the entablature, the thin layers of stone which delineate window openings and main entrances, the bronze light fixtures flanking the entrances, the sculpted bronze panels located in window apertures between storeys and the building's signature Coat of Arms and "E.R. 1937" set in the centres of their respective entablatures.

The compositional relationships of the three principal facades, their constituent elements and the surviving original materials within would be important to maintain in future development.

The layout, similar to that of many other Federal Buildings, contained postal and customs services in the ground floor's rectangular plan. The U-plan on the second-storey contained additional Federal Government offices and a caretaker's apartment. This layout has suffered few changes - addition of an elevator and washrooms for the disabled, and relocation of some partitions - and its principal characteristics would be important to maintain in future use.

The installation of aluminum windows has marred the building's compositional and material coherence. Consideration should be given to replacement of these windows in wood to suit the original design when the present windows reach the end of their useful life.

The relatively unaltered relationship between the building and its two adjacent small parks on Queen and Frederick Streets contributes greatly to the strong presence of the structure and would be important to maintain.

1992.12.08