

Hamilton, Ontario
Armoury
James Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Armoury on James Street North was constructed in three stages and actually consists of two drill halls built side by side with interconnecting wings. The North Drill Hall was built in 1888 to plans drawn up by Henry James, staff architect of the Department of Militia and Defence. In 1908 the second and larger South Drill Hall was designed for the Department of Public Works by the Hamilton architectural firm of Steward and Whitton. A two-storey extension was built to create a continuous brick façade along James Street. In 1936 an addition was attached to the back of the original Drill Hall and extended along Hughson Street to the South Drill Hall to create one large complex, now commonly referred to as the Armoury. It is currently owned by the Department of National Defence. See FHBRO Building Report 86-15.

Reason for Designation

On September 10, 1986, the building was designated Classified because of its direct association with events of national importance, because of its very good aesthetic and functional design, and because of its important contribution to the character of the area.

It was originally built for Hamilton's volunteer militia, whose growth and development closely corresponds to the evolution of the active volunteer militia force throughout the colony. It serves today as headquarters for the 11th Field Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery, reputed to be the oldest Canadian military unit still in existence; the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry; the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada; and the 705 Communications Squadron.

The architectural styles of the two Drill Halls are quite different, but their compatible scale and materials give the present complex an impressive unity. The North Drill Hall is one of the oldest in the country, and is of a picturesque Romanesque Revival style. The South Drill Hall has a more dramatic and highly symmetrical façade. The truss work spanning the interior parade grounds in the two Drill Halls are each significant accomplishments for their time.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this property is defined by the street façades on James, Robert and Hughson Streets, and by the interiors of the two drill halls.

The façades are of red brick with decorative cut stone dressing and trim, the masonry work being of high quality and well maintained. The fronts of the drill halls are characteristic of facilities of this kind at the time, with corner

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Armoury (Continued)

towers flanking a central gable. The clearly demarcated entrances, the prominent gable fronts and the buttresses along the side walls clearly reflect the interior layout and function. The exterior design of the connecting wings is subdued but sympathetic, providing a high degree of integrity to the complex. All elements of the exteriors on at least the three major street elevations should be preserved.

The interior of the North Drill Hall is marked by an exposed wooden truss system above the central parade ground, reputed to be the oldest structure of its size in the city. Also of note is the well crafted staircase leading to the old officers' mess rooms. The South Drill Hall is marked by a steel truss system which provided at the time what is believed to be the largest interior space of its type in the country. Other significant features include the officers' mess, with its carved oak staircases decorated with regimental insignia, the french doors with art nouveau decoration, and the wrought iron viewing gallery. The interior layout and decorative treatment of these drill hall interiors should be preserved, and any new work which is required designed to protect and enhance the traditional quality of these spaces.

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