

CPR John Street Roundhouse Complex

Description

The property at 222 Bremner Boulevard was designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act on August 12, 1996 by By-law No. 1996-0385. The CPR John Street Roundhouse Complex, consisting of the roundhouse, turntable, sand and coal loader, and water tower, meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario in 2006 under all three categories of design, associative and contextual value. The roundhouse and auxiliary structures are the surviving integral components of the John Street Yard, the railway facility developed by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1929-1931. The complex operated for over half a century, continuing after the conversion from steam to diesel power. The CPR John Street Roundhouse complex is recognized by the federal government as a National Historic Site

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The CPR John Street roundhouse, with the adjoining turntable, sand and coal loader, and water tower, represent rare surviving components of a railway complex that is associated with technological achievement. The roundhouse was completed as the largest of its type in Canada and formed the nucleus of the first railway complex outside the United States to use innovative “direct steaming” for servicing coal-fueled railway locomotives. This process relied on a mixture of steam and water to keep locomotive boilers at a constant reduced pressure during repairs. Afterward, increasing the pressure to operating levels took mere minutes instead of over an hour. This technology decreased the turnaround time for locomotive maintenance and improved fuel consumption. Direct steaming offered smoke abatement, thereby improving conditions for workers while extending the life of the roundhouse. The CPR John Street roundhouse was specifically designed for direct steaming, and introduced a four-track turntable to direct locomotives into its 32 stalls. Outside, the elevated water tower serviced the yard, while the two-part sand and coal loader dispensed sand to increase traction on the rails and fuel to operate the locomotives.

The CPR John Street Roundhouse Complex is associated with the historical development of Toronto’s railway lands and the role of the railway in the economic and social evolution of Toronto and Canada. By the mid 19th century, the arrival of the first steam railways in Toronto introduced an alternative form of transportation for people and goods and brought industry and workers to the city. The railway companies concentrated their lines and facilities on the land adjoining Toronto harbour. In the early 1900s, the City and the major railway operators cooperated to extend and elevate the railway lands through a series of landfill projects. In 1931, the Canadian Pacific Railway completed its new yard along the south side of Front Street at the foot of John Street. Designed for the repair and storage of locomotives and passenger cars, the CPR John Street complex included nearly 30 structures and employed over 150 workers. Following World War II with the decline of passenger trains and the event of diesel power, the complex was

converted to service diesel engines and obsolete structures were gradually removed. The key components of the John Street yard, specifically the roundhouse, turntable, water tower, and sand and coal loader, were preserved in Roundhouse Park in the 1990s as surviving reminders of the key role the railways played in Toronto's history and growth.

Contextually, the CPR John Street Roundhouse Complex is a landmark in Toronto's former railway lands. With the distinctive shape of the roundhouse and the placement of the adjoining structures associated with the former CPR John Street yard, the complex is the focus of Roundhouse Park, south of Front Street West.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the CPR John Street Roundhouse Complex relating to its design, associative and contextual value as a rare surviving example of a former railway facility that is associated with technological achievement and the transportation history of Toronto where it is a landmark in the railway lands are:

CPR John Street Roundhouse

- The scale, form and massing
- The materials, consisting of concrete, brick and wood
- Above a concrete foundation, the post-and-beam construction with heavy timber, brick exterior walls, raised brick parapets on the end bays, interior brick fire walls, interior posts, and concrete floors
- The three-quarter-round circular plan that rises one extended storey and opens to the northeast
- The 32 stalls, numbered from east to west, which are narrower in length in the centre of the building
- The sloped wood roof, with a clerestory that is glazed on two sides and rises at a slight angle on the south side
- Along the northeast façade, the double wood doors, opening in both directions
- The rear (southwest) wall and side walls, displaying large openings with multi-paned windows
- On the interior, the interior brick fire walls, the wood posts, and the wood catwalks
- In the remaining interior stalls, the tracks and inspection pits

Turntable, Sand and Coal Loader, and Water Tower

- The exterior turntable, consisting of a steel bridge structure with a three-point or rim design and four tracks, which extends over a circular concrete pit
- The sand and coal loader, comprised of two circular silos built of reinforced concrete with a brick hoist tower
- The water tower, with a steel tank supported on four steel legs above a concrete base

The machine shop annex, attached to the northwest corner of the Roundhouse, is not included in the Reasons for Designation.