

Reasons for Designation (Statement of Significance)

251 King Street East: National Hotel

Description

The property at 251 King Street East is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, associative and contextual value. Located on the southeast corner of King Street East and Sherbourne Street, the property contains a three-storey hotel. In 1973, the site was listed on the inaugural City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Historically, the property has been associated with inn keeping since the mid 1800s, and the present building is purportedly the oldest surviving hotel in the original Town of York that is recognized on the City's heritage inventory. In the 1870s, William Burke operated the Grand Central Hotel on-site. By the close of the 19th century, the operation was known as the National Hotel, and continued in business under this name through the post-World War II era. In 1905, the building was extended by a rear (south) addition.

The National Hotel was updated with highly crafted elements of Edwardian Classicism, the most popular style of the era that was favoured particularly for commercial and residential buildings. The National Hotel displays key elements of the style in the extended and decorated cornice marking the facades along King Street East and Sherbourne Street, the oversized voussoirs and keystones highlighting the round-arched door and window openings, and the other Classical detailing.

With the Classical updates added after 1900, the National Hotel is linked to the practice of Toronto architect Henry Simpson, who was eulogized as "one of the best known of Toronto architects in the era of building expansion" (Obituary, Henry Simpson, Toronto Star, December 17, 1926). Simpson began his architectural career as an apprentice to the prominent Toronto architect, E. J. Lennox before receiving further training in New York City. Returning to Toronto in 1888, Simpson's designs included the landmark Metallic Roofing Company of Canada's Pressed Metal Showroom in Toronto. While Simpson embarked on short-term partnerships with other architects, most of his portfolio involved individual commissions, including the updates to the National Hotel. Simpson's name appears on the building permit for the addition to the 19th century building, and it is probable that this project included alterations to the original structure where the entrances complemented the Classically detailed door surround introduced on the south wing.

The National Hotel also contributes to the existing historical character of the original Town of York neighbourhood. Following the founding of York (Toronto) in 1793, a 10-block townsite was established with King Street as the community's "Main Street". The street linked the government and military precincts adjoining the town, and divided the

industrial sector to the south from the residential area to the north. King Street was the location of the Town's landmark commercial and institutional buildings, and continued as a financial and business sector through the 19th century. The prominent intersections of Jarvis and Sherbourne streets attracted banks and hotels, with the hostelry historically known as the National Hotel as a predominant anchor building on the southeast corner of Sherbourne Street.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes associated with the property's cultural heritage value are:

- The scale, form and massing
- The three-storey original building with the complementary three-storey rear (south) wing
- The buff brick cladding with brick, stone, and metal detailing
- The Classical detailing, with the first-storey round-arched openings with oversized voussoirs and keystones, the pilasters on the north façade, the Ionic half-columns on the north entrance, the chamfered band courses, the quoins, the cornice highlighting the first-floor storefront, and the extended cornice with brackets above the third storey
- The flat-headed window openings with brick flat arches and stone sills
- The placement of the building, anchoring the southeast corner of King Street East and Sherbourne Street
- The situation of the building on the southward slope from King Street East