

Designation Under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act - 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) (North Toronto)

(City Council on November 23, 24 and 25, 1999, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Toronto Community Council recommends the adoption of the following report (September 3, 1999) from the Managing Director, Toronto Historical Board:

Purpose:

This report recommends that the property at 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) be designated for architectural and historical reasons under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

That City Council state its intention to designate the property at 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) for architectural and historical reasons under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

That the appropriate officials be authorized to take whatever action is necessary to give effect hereto.

Background:

At its meeting of October 20, 1999, the Board of Heritage Toronto had before it the attached report recommending the designation of the property at 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. Representatives of the property owner appeared at the meeting to object to the proposed designation. The property has been listed on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties* since 1978. In 1992, the Toronto Historical Board presented Dominion Coal with an Award of Merit for their restoration of the vintage painted advertising on the silos.

Comments:

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation:

Dominion Coal Silos
319 Merton Street

The property at 319 Merton Street is recommended for designation for architectural and historical reasons. The Dominion Coal Silos were constructed in 1928 according to the designs of the E. P. Muntz Engineering Company. Consisting of nine adjoining concrete silos and a coal loader, the structure retains its distinctive painted signage.

The Dominion Coal Silos are located on the southwest corner of Merton Street and Mount Pleasant Road. The property is historically significant as the location of the Dominion Coal and Wood Company, which operated on the site for over 60 years. The Dominion Coal Silos are rare surviving examples of a building type that is unique in North America. With its proximity to the historic Belt Line Railway route, the property is a landmark in the Davisville neighbourhood.

Conclusions:

Heritage Toronto recommends that City Council designate the property at 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) for architectural and historical reasons under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

Contact Name:

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(Communication (October 12, 1999) addressed to
the Chair and Members, Toronto Historical Board)

Recommendation

That City Council state its intention to designate the property at 319 Merton Street (Dominion Coal Silos) pursuant to Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* to be of architectural and historical value.

That the appropriate officials be authorized to take whatever action is necessary to give effect hereto.

Comments

Background:

On August 7, 1999, the Board received a request to designate the property at 319 Merton Street under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The Dominion Coal and Wood Company, which occupied the property for over 60 years, closed its business in September 1999. Staff has been advised that

the new property owners have applied for a demolition permit to remove the Dominion Coal Silos and develop residential housing on the site.

The property was included on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties* on August 14, 1998. In 1992, the Toronto Historical Board presented Dominion Coal with an Award of Merit for their restoration of the vintage painted advertising on the silos.

A Short Statement of Reasons for Designation, intended for publication, follows. A Heritage Property Report (Long Statement of Reasons for Designation), including visuals, is attached. Both documents constitute the Reasons for Designation.

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation:

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(Heritage Property Report (October 1999)
(Dominion Coal Silos, 319 Merton Street)

Table Of Contents

Basic Building Data
Historical Background
Development of the Northern Suburbs and the Belt Line Railway
319 Merton Street
Architectural Description
Context
Summary
Sources Consulted

Attachments:

- I Short Statement of Reasons for Designation
- II Location Map

III Photograph

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Heritage Property Report

Basic Building Data:

Address: 319 Merton Street (southwest corner of Merton Street and Mount Pleasant Road)

Ward: 23

Current Name: Dominion Coal Silos

Historical Name: Dominion Coal Silos

Construction Date: 1928

Architect: E. P. Muntz Engineering Company

Contractor/Builder: J. B. Nicholson Company

Additions/Alterations: none

Original Owner: Dominion Coal and Wood Company

Original Use: commercial (storage silos)

Current Use*: vacant

Heritage Category: Notable Heritage Property (Category B)

Recording Date: October 1999

Recorder: HPD:KA

- this does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined in the Zoning By-law
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Historical Background:

1. Development of the Northern Suburbs and the Belt Line Railway:

Until the 1880s, the area along Yonge Street between St. Clair and Eglinton Avenues was the location of farm lots mingled with country estates. To spur the development of the area as a residential suburb north of the city core, a group of prominent Toronto businessmen formed the Belt Line Railway Company in 1889 to construct a commuter railway. Beginning at the second Union Station, the railway ran in two loops with one route north through the Don Valley to Moore Park and another west up the Humber Valley to Eglinton Avenue. A spur line extended along the north boundary of Mount Pleasant Cemetery then northwest through Forest Hill to join the two sections. The Belt Line Railway Company went bankrupt before the project was completed, but the line was opened and operated by the Grand Trunk Railway from 1892 until 1894. By 1905, only 5 miles of operative track remained to serve businesses at the south end of North Toronto. The Grand Trunk Railway and its successor, Canadian National Railways, retained this section.

Industrial activity in this area began in the early 19th century with the opening of a sawmill and pottery on Mount Pleasant Creek (formerly Mud Creek) at Yonge Street. In 1845, the Davisville Potteries were established on Merton Street, east of Mount Pleasant Road, where it operated for nearly a century. With the opening of the Belt Line Railway and the survival of the portion south of Merton Street as an industrial spur line, industries congregated along the street. By the 1920s, the portion of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Mount Pleasant Road was bounded by Milnes Fuels on the west and the Dominion Coal and Wood Company on the east.

319 Merton Street:

In 1912, W. H. Smith founded the Dominion Coal and Wood Company on Danforth Avenue. As a retail supplier, the company imported coal from Wales, Pennsylvania and West Virginia and brought in wood from North Bay and ice from Lake Simcoe. Over time, the business was expanded to include sand, gravel, cement, limestone, lumber and other bulk building materials.

In 1928, Dominion Coal and Wood acquired property on Merton Street and engaged the engineering firm of E. P. Muntz to construct a facility for the sale and storage of coal and other products. The complex, completed at a cost of \$100,000, included “the best silos in Canada” (Business Journal, 80). The Dominion Coal and Wood Company continued to sell coal as late as 1999, although several silos were used to store building supplies.

In addition to its Danforth and Merton facilities, in 1940 the Dominion Coal and Wood Company opened an additional yard at Dupont Street and Dovercourt Road (it closed in 1998). Part of the Merton Street property was severed in 1977. The following year, on the recommendation of the Toronto Historical Board, Toronto City Council included the Dominion Coal Silos on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties*. After nearly 90 years in business, and almost 60 years on this site, the Dominion Coal and Wood Company closed in September 1999.

Architectural Description:

The Dominion Coal Silos consist of a row of nine adjoining round concrete silos, rising 40 feet (or metres), and a coal loader. The silos retain their distinctive painted advertising, reading “USE DOMINION COAL AND WOOD” in orange, black and white. The restoration of this

signage received an Award of Merit from the Toronto Historical Board (now Heritage Toronto) in 1992.

Context:

The Dominion Coal Silos are located on the southwest corner of Merton Street and Mount Pleasant Road. The south boundary is marked by the right-of-way of the former Belt Line Railway with the expansive grounds of Mount Pleasant Cemetery beyond. The silos face east onto Mount Pleasant Road where they are distinctive features in the Davisville neighbourhood.

Summary:

The property at 319 Merton Street is identified for architectural and historical reasons. Built by a company that operated in Toronto for nearly a century, the Dominion Coal Silos are an important surviving example of a building type unique in North America and a reminder of the role of the Belt Line Railway in the development of Toronto.

Sources Consulted:

City of Toronto Directories, 1912 ff.

“87 years in business”. *Toronto Star* (20 May 1999).

Kinsella, Joan. *A Walking Tour of the Old Deer Park Farm Area*. Deer Park Branch, Toronto Public Library, 1994.

“Landmarks: Coal enough for you?” *Metropolitan Toronto Business Journal* (November 1992) 44.

Moore Park: An Introductory History. Moore Park Sesquicentennial Committee, 1984.

Rasky, Frank. “Stoking Dominion’s Silos”. *Business Journal* (January/February 1985) 80.

Richie, Don. *North Toronto*. Erin, Ont.: Boston Mills Press, 1992.

Scadding, Henry. *Toronto of Old (1873)*. Edited by F. H. Armstrong. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1966.

Appendix I

Short Statement of Reasons for Designation

Dominion Coal Silos
319 Merton Street

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Mr. David Hunwicks, Project Manager, Planning, Urbancorp appeared before the Toronto Community Council in connection with the foregoing matter.

Insert Table/Map No. 1
319 Mertons Street

Insert Table/Map No. 2
319 Mertons Street