

Intention to Designate Under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act - 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) (Don River)

(City Council on April 11, 12 and 13, 2000, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Toronto Community Council recommends the adoption of the following report (March 1, 2000) from the Commissioner of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, subject to the insertion of the following paragraph into the report:

“The City understands that an adaptive reuse of the building will be required and would not want the designation to discourage reuse. In particular it understands and accepts that there will likely be alterations proposed to the exterior walls of the building, although not including the south façade, and to the interior. Those alterations may include the selective removal of elements mentioned in the complete designation description, including the jail cells and the bars on the windows. The City looks forward to working with a potential purchaser of the building and to seeing this building reused.”

The Toronto Community Council submits the following report (March 1, 2000) from the Commissioner Economic Development, Culture and Tourism:

Purpose:

This report recommends that the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) be designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) City Council state its intention to designate the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.
- (2) City Council request the Ontario Realty Corporation to require any future owner of the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) to enter into an Heritage Easement Agreement with the City of Toronto as a condition of the sale.
- (3) should an Heritage Easement Agreement not be secured at the time of sale, City Council require any future owner of the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) to enter into an Heritage Easement Agreement as a condition of the rezoning of the site.

- (4) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of February 21, 2000, the Toronto Preservation Board had before it a staff report on the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) and adopted the recommendations listed above.

The property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) was included on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties* on June 20, 1973. The property is for sale by the Ontario Realty Corporation. The Toronto Preservation Board recommends that the property be designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* to reinforce Toronto City Council's interest in the preservation of this architecturally and historically significant property.

Comments:

The property at 550 Gerrard Street East is designated for architectural and historical reasons. The Don Jail was constructed in 1859-1864 according to the designs of the early Toronto architect William Thomas. The Don Jail embodied progressive ideas of prison reform in the 19th century and attempted to provide an appropriate setting for the reform of offenders.

The Don Jail is an excellent example of Renaissance Revival styling, highlighted by the craftsmanship of the stone detailing. The building is constructed of brick, faced with stone and brick, and trimmed with stone, wood and iron. The plan features a four-storey centre block flanked by 3½-storey side wings (east and west). A hip roof with gables and a half-octagonal skylight covers the centre block, and gabled roofs protect the wings (the slate cladding and ventilation towers were removed). On the principal (south) façade, the entrance is placed in an arched stone surround with banded columns, entablature, keystone, and vermiculated voussoirs and tympanum. Double wood panelled doors retain the original hardware. The south façade has rusticated piers, a moulded belt course, and a cornice with modillion blocks and brackets. All of the walls display segmental-headed openings with stone sills and surrounds, and wood windows with iron bars.

The first-floor entrance hall, Governor's Room and service room, the three-storey Rotunda with clerestory windows and cast iron balconies, the adjoining cellblocks with ironwork grilles, cell doors and staircases are significant interior areas. A rare structural floor system is composed of stone slabs on cast iron joints for the main floor, attic floor and cells. The interior elements are described in detail in the Heritage Property Report (Long Statement of Reasons for Designation).

Located on the north side of Gerrard Street East between the Don Valley and Broadview Avenue, the Don Jail retains its landscaped setting with parkland to the south and west. Used for over a century, the Don Jail is an integral part of the history and development of the City of Toronto and of Canada's penal system. It is a rare example of period design in Canada, where most jails were integrated into courthouse complexes. One of the most important mid-19th

century public buildings constructed in Toronto, the Don Jail is a conspicuous landmark in the Riverdale neighbourhood and in the city.

Conclusions:

The Toronto Preservation Board recommends that City Council designate the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

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Heritage Preservation Services

Heritage Property Report
550 Gerrard Street East: Don Jail

This report is the “Long Statement of Reasons for Designation” for the designation of the property at 550 Gerrard Street East (Don Jail) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*. It contains Basic Building Data, as well as sections on the Historical Development, Architectural Description and Context of the property. Sources, the “Short Statement of Reasons for Designation” (intended for publication), Map and Photographs are attached.

Basic Building Data:

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|--------------------|---|
| Address: | 550 Gerrard Street East (north side of Gerrard Street East, between St. Matthews Road, Don Jail Roadway, Broadview Avenue and the service road south of Riverdale Hospital) |
| Ward: | 25 (Don River) |
| Current Name: | Don Jail |
| Historical Name: | Don Jail |
| Construction Date: | 1859-1864 |
| Architect: | William Thomas |

Contractor/Builder: various contractors and craftsmen including: Skelsey and Sinclair, masonry and ironwork; James Welch, carpenter; Worthington Brothers, masonry; Edward Beckett, ironwork; St. Lawrence Foundry, ironwork; John Thomas, stone carving, attrib. (Stevens Burgess, A8)

Additions/Alterations: 1888, interior alterations, Charles Mancel Willmot, architect;
1889, laundry (now Don Jail Annex) added, Charles Mancel Willmot, architect;
1940s and 1970s, ventilation towers removed from wings
1955-1958, East Wing (now Toronto Jail) added, Barnett and Rieder, architects;
1986, brick fences (enclosing exercise yards to north and west) removed;
dates unknown, Sally Port added in east wing basement (for adjacent Toronto Jail); brick chimney removed; interior alterations to upper floors of centre block

Original Owner: City of Toronto

Original Use: institutional (jail)

Current Use*: institutional (jail); * this does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined in the Zoning By-law

Heritage Category: Category A

Recording Date/Recorder: February 2000/KA

Historical Background:

Riverdale:

After the founding of Toronto as the Town of York in 1793, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe directed the division of portions of land around the townsite into a series of Park Lots and farm lots that were distributed to government and military officials. Lot 15 in Concession 1 from the Bay was awarded to John Scadding (c.1754-1824), the manager of Simcoe's Wolford Estate in Devonshire. During Simcoe's tenure in North America from 1791 to 1796, Scadding accompanied him as his secretary. The Don River and present-day Queen Street East, Broadview Avenue and Danforth Avenue delineate Scadding's allotment. In 1798, he erected a log cabin near Queen Street that was later relocated to Exhibition Place. The oldest known surviving building in Toronto, Scadding Cabin is listed on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties*. Scadding returned to Canada in 1821, selling the south half of his farm lot and building a second house on the property now occupied by the Don Jail.

In 1856, the heirs of the Scadding property sold nearly 120 acres north of present-day Gerrard Street East to the City of Toronto as the future location of an “Industrial Farm, House of Refuge, and Jail for City and County”. A commission for the city’s fourth prison was awarded in 1857, and a House of Industry and Refuge “for the less criminal portion of the disorderly population” opened on the property north of the jail site by 1860. The House of Industry was converted into an isolation hospital for smallpox victims prior to its demolition in 1894. It was the forerunner of present-day Riverdale Hospital.

When the House of Industry and the fourth Toronto Jail (Don Jail) opened, their location was outside the city boundaries. With the second Toronto General Hospital (1855) on the west bank of the Don River, the area was reserved for institutional uses and parkland. The City opened Riverdale Park on either side of the Don Valley in 1880. With the construction and improvement of bridges across the lower Don River, residential development began east of the valley. In 1884, the City of Toronto annexed Riverdale.

Don Jail and architect William Thomas:

In 1799, the first York Jail opened on King Street East. It was superseded by a second jail, completed in 1827 on Courthouse Square in the block bounded by King, Toronto, Newgate (Adelaide) and Church Streets. Plans for subsequent prisons in the city reflected new approaches to the incarceration of prisoners. In the 18th century, prisons served to confine and reform offenders. The movement to improve prison conditions began in 1777 when John Howard, an English sheriff, documented the deplorable treatment of inmates in his book, “The State of the Prisons in England and Wales”. In North America, two conflicting approaches to punishment emerged. The “Pennsylvania System” was based on the belief that solitary confinement promoted the self-examination and reflection of prisoners. Eastern Penitentiary near Cherry Hill, Pennsylvania (1820) adapted a panopticon plan first published by Jeremy Bentham, an English political economist, in 1791. In this scheme, a central observation block provided views into the radiating wings where individual cells flanked interior corridors. The Pennsylvania System was adopted throughout the Western world, and Eastern Penitentiary was regarded as a model prison. The opposing “Auburn System”, named for Auburn Penitentiary (1816-1825) in New York State, was restricted to North America. At Auburn, reform was based on a congregate system, rather than solitary confinement. Prisoners worked during the day and, at night, were jailed in cells placed back-to-back in common areas with natural light and ventilation.

In Toronto, a third City Jail opened in 1838 on the southeast corner of Front and Berkeley Streets, a site previously occupied by the first and second provincial Parliament Buildings. Architect John Howard used a panopticon plan with a central hexagonal pavilion, two adjoining wings and room to add a third. This facility was vacated in 1865 following the opening of the fourth City Jail, later known as the Don Jail.

In 1857, Toronto City Council awarded the commission to design the new prison to the Toronto architectural firm of William Thomas and Sons. The founder, William Thomas (1799-1860), was born in Suffolk and raised in Gloucestershire. Between 1814 and 1820, he apprenticed as a carpenter/joiner with John Gardiner, a builder. His brother, John Thomas, became a noted

architectural sculptor who assisted the renowned English architect, Sir Charles Barry, on the Houses of Parliament.

Following his apprenticeship, William Thomas relocated to Birmingham where he worked for Richard Tutin, a builder and surveyor. When the pair formed a partnership, the firm was listed as “Tutin and Thomas, architects and surveyors” (McArthur, xvii). After Tutin died in 1832, Thomas moved to Leamington Spa, a resort town where he designed chapels and residences. In 1839, he received a major commission for the Church of St. Matthew’s in Duddeston, near Birmingham. During this period, Thomas published a book entitled “Designs for Monuments and Chimney Pieces”.

Seeking financial opportunities, William Thomas immigrated to Canada in 1843. His earliest surviving commission is the Commercial Bank of the Midland District, originally located on Wellington Street West near Yonge Street. Dating to 1845, it is the second oldest remaining bank building in Toronto (after the Bank of Upper Canada on Adelaide Street East), one of the oldest stone structures in the city, and a rare example of Greek Revival styling. The Commercial Bank was dismantled and reassembled inside the Galleria at BCE Place in 1992. This project helped establish Thomas’ reputation as an important and sought after architect. Commissions for St. Michael’s Cathedral on Bond Street (1845-1848), the Bishop’s Palace on Church Street (1845-1846), Oakham Hall (William Thomas House) on Church Street (1848), and St. Lawrence Hall on King Street East (1850-1851) followed. All of the latter properties are included on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties*. Thomas’ practice extended across the province and country where he designed 30 churches. Among his notable commissions in Ontario were the Jail in Simcoe (1846), the Second Brock’s Monument in Queenston (1853), and the Guelph Town Hall (1856). William Thomas was the co-founder with architect John George Howard of the Toronto Society of Architects in 1847. Two years later, he was a founding member of the Canadian Institute. Following the Great Fire of 1849 that destroyed most of the Old Town of York, Toronto City Council appointed Thomas chairman of a committee to draft new legislation to improve building conditions. William Thomas trained several apprentices who went on to become successful architects, among them William Storm (1826-1892) and James Avon Smith (1832-1918).

The commission for the Don Jail carried the proviso that the building be modelled on the Pentonville Prison in London, England, completed in 1842. Designed by Sir Joshua Jebb with assistance from Sir Charles Barry, the complex featured a panopticon plan with a centre pavilion and four radiating wings. William Thomas’ original plans for the Don Jail followed this configuration, with a centre block flanked by two side wings (east and west) and two diagonal rear wings. Plans for the centre block had areas for reception, administration, education and services, an apartment for the Governor, and a chapel. A rotunda for communal activity and for the observation of the cellblocks in the adjoining wings was placed at the centre. The wings were organized to accommodate different categories, ages and sexes of prisoners. Plans for the side wings showed the placement of the cells along the exterior walls flanking a central inspection corridor. The rear wings were arranged differently, with corridors along the outside walls and, in the centre, blocks of cells placed back-to-back.

The construction of the Don Jail involved a series of delays, changes in contractors and suppliers, and financial constraints. The original plans were altered to reflect changing needs and new requirements imposed by the provincial government that was partly financing the prison. The two-storey chapel planned for the centre block was reduced to a single storey, and a floor was added to accommodate schoolrooms and an infirmary. The rear wings were eliminated, and the interior arrangement of the side wings was changed to include pairs of back-to-back cells with corridors along the walls. With this alteration, the design of the complex changed from a panopticon plan to one reflecting the “Auburn System” of prison organization. While a fire severely damaged the centre block in 1862, construction continued. With the exception of the removal of the rear wings, the exterior of the building reflected William Thomas’ original vision for the project. He died during its construction and William Tutin Thomas (1829-1892) and Cyrus Pole Thomas (1833-1911), partners with their father in the firm of William Thomas and Sons, completed the jail. When the building was finished, the brothers relocated to Montreal where they shared a practice until 1871.

Opening in 1864, the Don Jail was the largest of the reforming prisons of the mid-19th century in North America. A report to Toronto City Council boasted that “in workmanship, in material, in design, in safety and architectural appearance, this building is second to none in Canada.” Prisoners worked on the adjacent jail farm where, in 1865, an inspector reported that “ten to twelve acres of oats and peas failed, but potatoes were abundant”. Participants in the Fenian Raids of the 1860s were among the first prisoners. George Bennett was incarcerated at the Don Jail in 1880 where he was hanged for the murder of George Brown, the publisher of the “Globe” newspaper. In the 1940s, Edwin Alonzo Boyd, the son of a Toronto policeman and leader of the Boyd Gang of bank robbers, gained notoriety for escaping from the Don Jail not once but twice. In 1962, Ronald Turpin and Arthur Lucas were the last of the 70 men hanged at the prison before capital punishment was abolished in Canada.

To relieve the congestion in the Don Jail, the Central Prison for Men operated on Strachan Avenue from 1887 until 1915 when new correctional facilities were completed in Guelph and the Langstaff Jail Farm was opened in Richmond Hill. In 1958, control of the Don Jail passed from the City of Toronto to the newly created Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. In that year, to alleviate the poor conditions and overcrowding in the Don Jail, the Toronto Jail opened on the adjoining site. The Province of Ontario’s Ministry of Correctional Services assumed responsibility for the property in the late 1960s. Following the opening of the Toronto East Detention Centre, the Don Jail closed in 1977. For the remainder of the 20th century, the complex was used for storage and as the setting for film productions. The Don Jail was listed on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties* on June 20, 1973.

Architectural Description:

Exterior: Don Jail

The Don Jail is designed in the Renaissance Revival style where the composition, scale and detailing are adopted from Italian Renaissance models. In 1829, English architect Sir Charles Barry revived interest in the architecture of 16th century Rome and Florence in his designs for the Travellers’ Club in London. The exaggerated detailing of Italian Mannerism is reflected in the

vermiculated (“worm-like”) stonework used in Renaissance Revival schemes. Barry used this device on the Pentonville Penitentiary, which provided a prototype for the Don Jail (McArthur, 126). The imposing style is an apt choice for a prison where “the plainness and monotony of the elevation is entirely consistent with the expression demanded of architecture in the period and was seen as the necessary counterpart in built form to the life within the walls” (THB, 1974).

The Don Jail is constructed of brick from Toronto brickyards and stone from quarries along the Niagara Escarpment and in Ohio. Stone, wood and iron is applied for exterior and interior trim. The structure rests on a rusticated limestone base with a full basement lighted by small windows. A rare structural floor system is composed of stone slabs on cast iron joints for the main floor, attic floor and cells (Stevens Burgess, D42). The balanced axial plan features a centre block that rises four stories on the principal (south) façade. Behind a centrally placed rotunda, the rear of the centre block extends 3½ stories to match the height of the adjoining side wings (east and west). The hip roof covering the centre block has a pediment on the south face and a gable with returned eaves on the rear (north) slope. The half-octagonal rotunda with clerestory windows and a skylight (now covered) rises above the centre of the roof. The side wings are protected by gable roofs and originally featured ventilation towers that were removed in the 20th century. The roofs were formerly clad with slate.

Attention is focused on the principal (south) façade of the centre block with its elaborate detailing and sandstone cladding. Yellow brick that complements the sandstone is applied on the remaining walls of the centre block and on the wings. On all elevations of the building, segmental-headed window openings display corbelled stone sills and moulded stone surrounds with keystones and quoins. The openings contain double-hung wood windows with iron bars.

The south façade of the centre block is organized into five bays. The principal entrance is centred in the lower wall. An elaborate entrance surround has a bracketed entablature supported on a pair of Doric columns with vermiculated bands. The surround incorporates a round-arched opening where vermiculated stone is applied on the radiating voussoirs that wrap inside the porch. Overhead, a keystone with the head of a bearded man represents “Blind Justice” or “Father Time”. Inside the archway, barred windows flank doubled panelled wood doors with the original hardware. A tympanum containing vermiculated stone surmounts the doors.

On either side of the entrance, the lower two floors are faced with smooth stone. Rusticated stone piers frame and separate the window openings. A moulded belt course runs above the second-floor openings, dividing the façade into two parts. In the upper floors, rusticated stone piers organise the window openings. Segmental-arched surrounds rise two stories to contain the third- and fourth-floor windows. A stone entablature surmounts each window surround. A projecting cornice with moulded brackets and modillion blocks tops the wall.

The remaining walls of the centre block, and the exposed elevations of the wings, are simply executed with plain brick cladding and a symmetrical arrangement of segmental-headed window openings. The openings are reduced in height on the wings and the rear (north) wall of the centre block. On the latter elevation, the attic level contains a trio of round-headed windows with a continuous sill. On each wing, there is projection on the north wall for the gun tower (west) and

gallows (east). The building is extended to the west by the laundry (annex) that is not included in the Reasons for Designation.

Interior: Don Jail

On the interior, the centre block contains the entrance hall and offices (front), rotunda (centre), and chapel and services rooms (rear). The flanking wings have cellblocks and prisoner day rooms. The walls are faced with red brick. The ground floor of the centre block and the floors in the cells are composed of Ohio sandstone flags. The remaining floors are wood clad. Cast iron is applied for the balconies in the Rotunda and for the stairs.

In the entrance hall, four stone stairways lead to the basement and a balustraded wood stair serves the upper floors of the centre block. Flanking the entrance hall, the Governor's office (later administration) on the west and service room to the east display wood mantelpieces and trim. North of the entrance hall, the three-storey rotunda in the centre block is an important area. The rotunda has a half-octagonal plan, the shape of which is repeated in the multi-paned skylight (now covered over) in the roof. There are clerestory windows in the upper storey and wrap-around balconies with iron railings at the second and third-floor levels. The balconies are supported on cast iron brackets that incorporate the shapes of serpents and gryphons. The original circular iron staircase leading from the main floor to the balcony was replaced. The plaster walls are scored to replicate stone coursing.

The centre block is separated from the wings on either side by a three-storey archway with a cast iron security grille in each floor and an iron-filled fanlight above. Inside each wing, an open iron staircase provides access from the second to the third floors. Each three-storey wing has a central row of back-to-back cells with day rooms (corridors) on either side. The cells retain their cast iron bars.

Context:

The Don Jail is located on the north side of Gerrard Street East between St. Matthew's Road and Broadview Avenue. The building is elevated above the adjoining streets. On the west, the property overlooks the Don Valley. The open space in front (south) of the Don Jail is reinforced by the grounds of St. Matthew's Lawn Bowling Club (clubhouse, 1906) and a section of Riverdale Park. The Don Jail is flanked on the east by the Toronto Jail (1955-1958) and to the north by the buildings of Riverdale Hospital (1961-1963). A curving road named Don Jail Roadway separates the Don Jail from the Gatekeeper's House (1865), the Governor's House (1888), and the Riverdale Branch of the Toronto Public Library (1909-1910) located at the northwest corner of Gerrard Street East and Broadview Avenue. The library branch and the lawn bowling clubhouse are identified on the *City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties*.

The Don Jail is part of an important institutional enclave on the east bank of the Don Valley overlooking Gerrard Street East. The adjacent Governor's House and Gatekeeper's House are important vestiges of the original Don Jail property. The Riverdale Library is located on the site of the gardens of the Governor's House. The last branch constructed in Toronto with funding

from the Carnegie Foundation, the Riverdale Library is one of six corner Carnegie libraries in Ontario.

With its elevated setting, the Don Jail is viewed from many vantagepoints. It is a landmark in the Riverdale neighbourhood and in the City of Toronto.

Summary:

The property at 550 Gerrard Street East is identified for architectural and historical reasons. The Don Jail was constructed from 1859-1864 according to the designs of early Toronto architect William Thomas. Historically, the Don Jail embodied progressive ideas of penal reform in the 19th century. Compared with the general conditions of the time, the Don Jail attempted to provide an appropriate setting for the reform of offenders. With Osgoode Hall (1829-1832 ff.), the Seventh Post Office on Toronto Street (1851-1853), and St. Lawrence Hall (1850), the Don Jail is among the most important public buildings erected in Toronto during the mid-19th century.

The Don Jail is an excellent example of Renaissance Revival styling, highlighted by the craftsmanship of its stone detailing. It is a rare example of period design in Canada, where most mid-19th century jails were integrated into courthouse complexes. The styling and mass of the building, with rusticated stonework and barred windows, supports its purpose and emphasizes its perceived impregnability.

The landscaped setting remains and is reinforced by the lawn bowling club and the park to southwest. The Don Jail is a conspicuous landmark in the neighbourhood and the City of Toronto.

In use for over a century, the Don Jail is an integral part of the history and development of the City of Toronto and of Canada's penal system.

Sources:

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Attachment I: “Short Statement of Reasons for Designation”

Don Jail
550 Gerrard Street East

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Located on the north side of Gerrard Street East between the Don Valley and Broadview Avenue, the Don Jail retains its landscaped setting with parkland to the south and west. Used for over a century, the Don Jail is an integral part of the history and development of the City of Toronto and of Canada’s penal system. It is a rare example of period design in Canada, where most jails were integrated into courthouse complexes. One of the most important mid-19th century public buildings constructed in Toronto, the Don Jail is a conspicuous landmark in the Riverdale neighbourhood and in the city.

Insert Map 1 – 550 Gerrard Street

Insert Map 2 – 550 Gerrard Street