

Women's College Hospital

Description

The property at 76 Grenville Street is worthy of inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties. Located on the north side of Grenville Street, between Bay Street (east) and Surrey Place (west), the original 10-storey hospital was completed in 1935, with major additions in 1956 and 1971. In 1995, the Government of Canada recognized the property as a National Historic Site where “the focus by Women’s College Hospital on women as medical professionals and on medical and health care for women and families makes WCH a unique institution in Canada” (Agenda Paper, National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1995, page 18).

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

Women’s College Hospital is valued as an important institution in the local community and beyond for its contributions to women’s health care, research, and education. Its origins may be traced to the Women’s Medical College (1883) and its successor, the Ontario Medical College for Women (1895), which were founded to address the difficulty women faced in pursuing medical training during the late 19th century. In 1914, the first Women’s College Hospital and Dispensary (or charitable outpatient clinic) was staffed by female doctors and medical students to deliver health services to urban women. The institution acquired its present site in 1929 where the first purpose-building hospital was completed in 1935. In 1961, Women’s College Hospital became a teaching hospital affiliated with the University of Toronto. Although it was briefly amalgamated with two other hospitals at the end of the 20th century, its distinctive role in women’s health care resulted in its re-emergence as the New Women’s College Hospital in 2006.

The significance of Women’s College Hospital extends beyond the city to the province, as the only hospital in Ontario whose primary focus is the delivery of dedicated health care to women by women. From its beginnings in promoting women’s access to medical training and services, Women’s College Hospital initiated advances in specialized medical care, surgery and research related to women’s health issues, including the development of the Pap Smear test for diagnosing cervical cancer, the opening of the first Cancer Detection Centre in Canada, the application of mammography as a tool in detecting breast cancer, and the operation of the earliest walk-in birth control clinic supported by a hospital. While Women’s College Hospital has remained at the forefront of women’s health care, the hospital continues to welcome patients of both sexes and its programs serve all age groups, from infants to the elderly.

The 1935 building of Women’s College Hospital (1935) is associated historically with the Boston-based partnership of Stevens and Lee, who were North America’s pre-eminent hospital architects in the early to mid 20th century. Working with their Toronto associate, Harold J. Smith, Stevens and Lee planned Women’s College Hospital as a state-of-the-art facility behind a traditional exterior. The plans followed Stevens and

Lee's design approach that blended an image of comfort, trust, traditional values and dependability with modern innovations in fireproofing, sound abatement and sanitation. The 1935 building was designed as the first phase of the ongoing evolution of the site, with major additions completed in 1956, 1971 and afterward by leading Toronto architectural firms, among them Marani, Morris and Allan and their successors, as well as Parkin Associates and Philip Carter.

The 1935 building at Women's College Hospital is a local landmark and provides a visual focus for the complex. It is distinguished by its height, decorative detailing and orientation to terminate the vista looking north up Elizabeth Street. With its quiet setting near the west end of Grenville Street, the hospital is placed near but not on major arterial roads and close to public transit. The site was originally chosen for its proximity to existing medical buildings, including the Toronto General Hospital on College Street, the neighbouring Toronto Psychiatric Hospital on Surrey Place, and the teaching and research facilities at the University of Toronto, many of which remain today.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the 1935 building of Women's College Hospital related to its design and contextual value as a purpose-built mid-20th century hospital that is a local landmark are:

- The scale and visible elements of the form
- The materials, including buff brick, limestone, tile and metal
- The roofline, with the chimney, towers and detailing
- On the exposed elevations, the fenestration and spandrels, and the decorative masonry detailing, including the geometric shapes and the coloured motifs
- Outside the south entrance, the sculpture entitled "Woman" by the notable Canadian sculptor Frances Gage
- On the interior, the staircase with metal railings at the northwest corner of the entrance lobby
- The cornerstones identifying the 1935, 1956 and 1971 buildings
- The prominent presence of the building in the complex and the hospital precinct of downtown Toronto, where it marks the northward terminus of Elizabeth Street