

Robert Barron Building

The property at 720 Yonge Street (specifically the three-storey building with convenience addresses at 726 and 728 Yonge Street) is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the provincial criteria prescribed for municipal designation under the three categories of design, associative and contextual values.

Description

Located on the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Charles Street West, the Robert Barron Building (1889) is a three-storey commercial building with a complementary south extension (1902). The property at 720 Yonge Street was listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties (now known as the Heritage Register) in 1974.

Statement of Significance

The property at 720 Yonge Street has cultural heritage value for the design of the Robert Barron Building as a well-crafted example of a late 19th century commercial edifice that displays elements of the popular styles of the era, which were seamlessly applied to the complementary south extension. The Robert Barron Building is particularly distinguished by the round-arched motifs and elaborate detailing associated with the Romanesque Revival style, as well as the chamfered northeast corner with the distinctive oriel window.

The property at 720 Yonge Street has value for its connection to the notable Toronto architect G. W. Gouinlock, who designed the 1889 building as one of his first projects as a solo architect and completed the 1902 south extension during his partnership with F. S. Baker. Although he accepted commissions for many of Toronto's landmark buildings, Gouinlock is recognized in particular for his work for the Canadian National Exhibition Association in the early 20th century when he reorganized the exhibition grounds and designed a collection of exhibition buildings, including many that are designated as National Historic Sites.

The property at 720 Yonge has associative value for its continuous ownership for over a century by two successive companies. Following its completion in 1889 and expansion in the early 20th century, the building housed the grocery business of Robert Barron, whose company retained the property until 1947. The next year, Carl and Jack Cole, co-founders of Coles Books, acquired the site where they operated an inaugural retail store and launched the famous "Coles Notes" series of reference books.

The associative value of the Robert Barron Building is also linked to its role in the historical development of Yonge Street as it evolved in the late 19th century. The

building contributed to the second generation of commercial storefronts that were identified by their height, narrow frontages and distinctive architectural detailing, particularly in the upper stories to reflect their prominence on the street. During this period, the unveiling of Toronto's first department stores near the Queen Street intersection changed the role of Yonge, leading to its revitalization as the city's new "main street" and resulting in the introduction of new storefronts, including the Robert Barron Building.

Contextually, the Robert Barron Building is valued for its contribution to the character of Yonge Street, south of Bloor Street West, which is typified by the surviving buildings, both individual and in groups that began the metamorphosis of Yonge Street in the late 19th century as Toronto's main commercial corridor. The Robert Barron Building is an integral part of the blocks along Yonge north of College Street that include the Oddfellows' Hall (1892) at 450 Yonge, the Bank of Montreal Building (1887) at 496 Yonge, the Scottish Ontario and Manitoba Land Company Stores (1883) at 664-680 Yonge, the William Luke Buildings (1883) at 744 Yonge street, and the intact group of commercial buildings adjoining the Yonge and Wellesley intersection, all of which are included on the City's Heritage Register.

The contextual value of the Robert Barron Building is also related to its historical and visual links to its surroundings on Yonge Street where it is a prominent local feature with its chamfered corner, distinctive decorative detailing and corner location.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the Robert Barron Building at 720 Yonge Street (identified for conveniences purposes as 726 and 728 Yonge) are:

- The placement, setback and orientation of the building on the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Charles Street West where the principal elevation faces east
- The scale, form and massing of the three-storey building, where the adjoining 1889 and 1901 sections are covered by flat roofs, and the brick chimney on the north end
- The materials, with the brick cladding (currently painted) and the brick, stone and wood detailing, including the window trim (east and north) and the corbelled brickwork on the parapets above the cornice lines (east and north)
- The chamfered northeast corner, with the oriel window in the second floor and the round-arched window opening incorporating the blind arch in the third storey
- On the principal (east) elevation, the first-floor storefronts with the surviving cast iron columns
- On the east elevation above the first storey, the vertical division of the 1889 and 1902 units by brick piers with decorative detailing, and the horizontal division of the wall with corbelled brickwork and brick string and band courses
- The near identical fenestration on the east elevation of the 1889 and 1902 units, with the single monumental segmental-arched window openings in the second

storey and the trio of flat-headed window openings with blind arches in the third floor, which have brick and stone detailing

- On the north elevation facing Charles Street West, the flat-headed window openings with brick and stone trim in the second and third floors, and the brick detailing on the wall
- The wood sash windows in the second- and third-storey openings on the east and north walls