

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1 FRONT STREET WEST ATTACHMENT NO. 3 (REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)

Dominion Public Building

The property at 1 Front Street West is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, associative and contextual values. Listed on the inaugural City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties (now the City of Toronto's Heritage Register) in 1973, the Dominion Public Building is a key component of the Union Station Heritage Conservation District, which was designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act in 2006. Parks Canada's Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office (FHBRO) designated the Dominion Public Building as a Classified Federal Heritage Building in 1983, and it was listed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places in 2011.

Description

Anchoring the southwest corner of Yonge Street and Front Street West, the Dominion Public Building is a large-scale federal government building that was commissioned by the Government of Canada's Department of Public Works and originally served as Toronto's Customs House. Completed in two phases in 1929-31 (centre and east pavilions) and 1934-35 (west pavilion), the north section of the building on Front Street West rises five stories, while the rear section extends six stories to address the change in grade.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The Dominion Public Building has cultural heritage value for its historic role as the federal government's Toronto Customs House for the administration, taxation, inspection and storage of imported and exported goods. Conceived by the federal government as a Customs House only, the Dominion Public Building was completed as the third and largest Customs House in the city, as well as the first to incorporate the public offices and the examining warehouse in the same building. The construction of the Dominion Public Building during the Great Depression of the 1930s was a reflection of the significance of Toronto to the nation's economic status and recovery.

The associative value of the Dominion Public Building is also through its connection to T. W. Fuller, who served from 1927 to 1936 as the Chief Architect of the Federal Department of Public Works, which was responsible for the in-house design of nearly all public architecture in Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the Great Depression, the Chief Architect oversaw monumental projects in the country's major centres, including Toronto where the Dominion Public Building remains Fuller's best known work.

From a design standpoint, the Dominion Public Building is valued as a rare and exceptional example in Canada of Beaux-Arts Classicism, the international style popularized for monumental public architecture in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Dominion Public Building has the hallmarks of the style with its imposing scale, the symmetrical organization of the facades,

the hierarchy of spaces from grand to utilitarian, the decorative detailing inspired by classical precedents, and its placement in a highly visible and prominent setting. As a rare and early surviving example of a public building in Toronto constructed by the federal government in the early 20th century, the Dominion Public Building was among the first applications of Beaux Arts Classicism to a federal design. The Dominion Public Building stands as an important physical reminder of the imposing public spaces created by the federal government, combining the monumentality and grandeur of the Front Street portion of the building (including the interior Long Room) with the practicality and accessibility of the warehouse component to the rear. Designed in two phases, over time the Dominion Public Building changed from a Customs House to a multi-use federal building, and the interior alterations dating to the 1980s and 1990s are part of the evolution of the building.

With the neighbouring Union Station (which was officially opened in 1927), the Dominion Public Building establishes the character of the area along Front Street, west of Yonge Street. Following the Great Fire of 1904 that destroyed most of the existing buildings in this area, Toronto's Civic Improvement Committee commissioned a plan (1911) by architect John M. Lyle that was based on the principles of the City Beautiful Movement and that envisioned Front Street as a grand boulevard with expansive tracts reserved for monumental architecture that included a new Union Station and Customs House (the Dominion Public Building). According to the federal government, "The Dominion Public Building and Union Station together form probably the most imposing Beaux Arts streetscape in Canada."¹

Contextually, the Dominion Public Building is historically, visually, physically and functionally linked to its important setting on the south side of Front Street where it anchors the southwest corner of Yonge Street (Toronto's "main street") and extends across the entire city block to Bay Street. As the third Customs House on the site, the Dominion Public Building occupies what was historically among the most sought-after locations in Toronto with its proximity to the city's financial district directly north, Union Station as its neighbour on the west, and the railway corridor and harbour to the south. The Dominion Public Building, with its office and warehouse components aligned to access Front, Yonge and Bay Streets, forms an important precinct.

As a monumental federal government building in a prominent location beside and complementing Union Station, the Dominion Public Building is a local landmark in Toronto.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the building known historically as the Dominion Public Building on the property at 1 Front Street West are:

- The placement, setback and orientation of the building on the south side of Front Street West where it extends from Yonge Street to Bay Street
- The scale, form and massing of the irregularly-shaped plan that rises five stories along Front Street to the flat roofline and follows the curve of Front Street west of Yonge

¹ Heritage Character Statement, Dominion Public Building, 1 Front Street West, Toronto, 1988.05.09

- The partially raised stone base with window openings, which is extended in height where the grade changes south of Front Street West
- On the reinforced concrete structure and above the granite clad foundation, the limestone cladding that is channelled on the extended first (ground) floor and smoothly dressed in the stories above, with the stone and metal detailing
- The tripartite organization of the north elevation on Front Street into the centre pavilion and the adjoining east and west pavilions, with the west pavilion rounded at the northwest corner and the east pavilion truncated at the northeast corner
- The horizontal division of the north elevation by the cornices above the extended first storey and beneath the parapet
- The centre pavilion, with the five-storey projecting frontispiece composed of six freestanding Ionic columns supporting the entablature inscribed "Dominion Public Building A.D. MCMXXX"
- At the base of the centre frontispiece, the two-storey main entrance where the three round-arched openings contain paired bronze doors beneath large transoms with metal mullions incorporating rope detailing and cast metal beavers (as symbols of Canada)
- The single secondary entrances on the north elevations of the east and west pavilions that repeat the detailing introduced on the central entrance The east elevation on Yonge Street, which extends 12 bays and is divided into three parts with a recessed centre section
- The five-bay west elevation facing Bay Street
- The fenestration on the north, east and west elevations, which is arranged between Ionic pilasters and features double-height round arched openings with keystones in the first floor, and single, paired and triple flat-headed openings with spandrel panels in the remaining floors, and the metal window mullions with the rope detailing in the first and second floors
- The classical detailing on the elevations facing Front, Yonge and Bay Streets, including the carved acanthus leaves, the dentils and the stone lion's heads
- On the rear (south) elevation, the end bays (east and west) that continue the decorative detailing and fenestration from the east and west elevations
- The central utilitarian section of the south wall with the fenestration and raised centre section
- On the interior, the organization and layout of the public spaces on the first-floor, including the three marble-clad lobbies
- The detailing in the east vestibule and lobby, with the marble floors, dado and door and window surrounds, including the marble door pediment inscribed "Long Room", the bronze window mullions between the lobby and the Long Room, the "enquiry" window in the lobby, and the classical detailing
- In the east pavilion, the two-storey Long Room, with the marble floors, dado and door and window surrounds, the marble counters with the brass wickets, the double row of square columns with the pilasters and the Corinthian capitals, the entrances with the bronze doors and classical detailing, the metal window mullions, the second-storey gallery with the brass balustrade, and the coffered plaster ceiling with the dentils and mouldings