

National Casket Company Factories
Description

The property known as the National Casket Company Factories at 89-109 Niagara Street 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. The National Casket Company Factories property is located at the south east corner of Niagara and Tecumseth Street. Four principal brick-clad buildings of three to five stories in height face the street with a collection of outbuildings and chimney stacks at the rear of the property.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The National Casket Company Factories complex is valued for its more than 150 year historic association with the commercial interests and manufacturing companies that have been located here in proximity to the railway lines at the southern edge of the property and for its historic associations with the South Niagara neighbourhood which was developed at the same time. The first commercial uses on the property quickly followed the arrival of the railways in the 1850s with the adaptation of the garrison hospital as a tobacco factory by 1858. By 1883 the first of the buildings in the complex was under construction, for felt hat manufacturing. The three other buildings followed with 95-97 Niagara Street completed in 1886 and 101-107 and 109 Niagara Street completed in 1887. They provided premises for wood planing, carpentry and furniture manufacturing, as well as for piano, piano parts and auto harp making. Eckardt's National Casket Company, with its associated National Silver Plate Company and National Dry Kilns, Planing Mills and Woodworking Company relocated to this site by 1908, after their Bay Street premises were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1904. Eckardt continued to occupy 95-109 Niagara Street until 1916 when it was purchased by the Dominion Manufacturing Company who continued to manufacture caskets on the property until 1973. Sixty-five years of caskets has given the property the popular name "the coffin factory." In the last three to four decades the complex has continued to function as a commercial and manufacturing facility with a variety of commercial spaces, studios and live-work accommodation.

The elevations of the four buildings facing onto Niagara and Tecumseth Streets are valued as fine and varied examples of a Classical style adapted to an industrial building type. All four feature pilasters or arcades terminating in either a cornice with a pediment or, as at 109 Niagara Street, a flat parapet. The two earliest buildings at 89-91 and 95-97 Niagara Street with their buff brick architectural elements indicate the influence of Georgian Neo-classicism prevalent in the city since its founding. The later buildings at 101-107 and 109 Niagara Street are monochromatic, relying on texture and relief, more complex rhythms and variety for their articulation indicating an Italianate Romanesque

influence that was to become widespread throughout the city's architecture from 1885 onwards as evident in both the City Hall (1885-99) and the Ontario Legislature Building (1886-92).

While a measured order prevails in the uniform disposition of architectural elements on the street facades, the functional aspects of the complex are apparent at the rear of the property where a cheaper buff brick was used on the earliest exterior walls and the arrangement of the outbuildings was devoted to functional efficiency and the movement of materials and manufactured goods to and from the railway sidings. Transportation was further accommodated by the three carriageways through the buildings from Niagara Street and one from Tecumseth Street. Entrances for all buildings except 109 Niagara Street were originally from the rear yard side. The dry kiln at 95-97 Niagara and chimney at 89-91 Niagara are important contributing elements to the functioning of the complex. The interior structure is a wood post and beam system typical of industrial buildings allowing flexibility and the accommodation of large machinery.

The buildings at 89-109 Niagara Street are valued for their importance in defining and maintaining the late-nineteenth century character of the area. Combined with the housing on the south side of Niagara Street they provide a consistent stretch of building fabric (excluding 121, 125-133 and 143 Niagara Street) constructed between 1883 and 1890 continuing all the way from Bathurst, across Tecumseth and up to Wellington Street. 89-109 Niagara Street is physically, functionally, visually and historically linked to its surroundings as it represents the commercial impact of the railways in the mid-late nineteenth century on lands adjacent to railway lines in the generation of business and employment opportunities. Situated at the corner of Tecumseth and Niagara Streets it is a significant landmark whose consistent presence has defined the character of the neighbourhood and provided facilities for manufacturers, crafts people and entrepreneurs for over 120 years.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the properties at 89-109 Niagara Street are the buildings historically known as the National Casket Company Factories with four buildings on the south-east corner of Niagara and Tecumseth Street and outbuildings at the rear of the property.

The heritage attributes on the exterior of 89-91 Niagara Street (1883-4) are:

- The location of the building on the south side of Niagara Street
- The scale form and massing of the building including the four-storey height and fifth-storey mansard roof
- The materials including brick cladding, with red and buff coloured brick, and the stone foundation
- The openings including the carriageway at the east end of the façade and the paired window openings at every level on both the north and south facades, excluding the fifth floor south façade which has continuous glazing

- The decorative elements on the north facade including the buff brick piers with their relief patterns, the stepped and dentillated red brick courses, the paired console brackets at the eaves
- On the north façade at the carriageway opening the heavy timber lintel and brick arch above
- In the courtyard the outbuildings including:
 - the three-storey buff brick extension and its existing original window and wall openings,
 - the buff brick elevator shaft with exposed ends of the metal tie rods and wall openings
 - the chimney
 - the two-storey red brick extension and its original window and wall openings
 - the projecting corbelled fire-break walls
 - the brick construction and detailing of openings, parapets etc.

The heritage attributes on the exterior of 95-97 Niagara Street (1886) are:

- The location of the building on the south side of Niagara Street
- The scale form and massing of the three-storey building with its raised basement and flat roof
- The materials including brick cladding, with red and buff coloured brick, and the stone foundation
- The openings including the paired window openings at every level on the north façade and the arrangement of windows on the west façade of the courtyard building
- The decorative elements on the north facade including the buff brick arcade, the buff brick window hoods with keystones, drop pendants and projecting hood moulding and the stepped brick courses above the stone foundation
- The dry kiln stack in the courtyard

The heritage attributes on the exterior of 101-107 Niagara Street (1887) are:

- The location of the building on the south side of Niagara Street
- The scale form and massing of the four-storey building and its flat roof
- The materials including red brick cladding and a stone foundation on the north façade, and buff brick on the south façade
- The wall openings including
 - the arched carriage way openings on the north façade at the first and fourth bays from the east end of the façade, the single doorway openings at the sixth and ninth bays and the single flat arched opening with its projecting brick mould at the west end of the façade, all on the ground floor level
 - the paired window openings at every level on the north façade with their curved window heads
 - the arrangement of single windows on the south façade of the courtyard building with curved window heads

- The decorative elements on the north facade including
 - the brick pilasters
 - the pairs of horizontal relief bands of brick at either side of the window heads
 - decorative brick details including the corbelled dentil courses, the saw tooth course, the alternating dentil courses and the stepped corbelled course at the eaves
 - the stone keystone in the fourth bay carriageway

The heritage attributes on the exterior of 109 Niagara Street (1887) are:

- The location of the building on the south-east corner of Niagara and Tecumseth Streets
- The scale form and massing of the four-and- a-half-storey building and its flat roof
- The materials including
 - brick cladding including red brick on the north and west façades, and buff brick on the south and east façades
 - the rusticated stone bases of the pilasters at the basement level and the stone lintels in the first floor openings
- The wall openings including
 - the flat-headed paired window openings in the first floor and raised basement on the north and west façades
 - the segmental arched openings of the windows on the second to fourth floor on the north and west façades
 - the flat-headed carriage way opening at the south end of the west façade
 - the arrangement of single windows on the east façade.
- The decorative elements on the north and west façades including
 - the brick arcades with their raised decorative profiles and decorative patterns on the arches
 - the alternating dentil courses, saw tooth courses, raised string courses above the window openings, and decorative brick panels in the parapets and over the corner entry door