

551 Mount Pleasant Road - Notice of Intention to Designate a Property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act

Date: August 31, 2022

To: Toronto Preservation Board

From: Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning

Wards: Ward 15 - Don Valley West

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council state its intention to designate the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road (including the active entrances at 549, 553 and 555 Mount Pleasant Road) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value.

Constructed in 1927 to the designs of architect Murray Brown as a vaudeville theatre and cinema for Famous Players Canada, the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is located on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road, north of Belsize Drive. The property is a fine and surviving example of an early 20th-century purpose-built theatre along a neighbourhood main street, a typology that was once common but is becoming increasingly rare. In addition to the association with Murray Brown and his designs for a series of atmospheric theatres in Ontario, Saskatoon and Halifax, the property has significant historical associations with the Crest Theatre, an influential repertory theatre company founded in 1953 with a mandate to "contribute to the cultural life of Canada by providing opportunities for the development of Canadian artistic directors, playwrights, designers, managers and technicians."¹ For the thirteen consecutive seasons that the Crest Theatre leased the property at 551 Mount Pleasant, they presented a full range of dramatic productions, including classical, contemporary, and original works.

The property has been a landmark in the Mount Pleasant Village neighbourhood for nearly a century and is beloved for its cultural heritage as a theatre.

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was listed on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register on May 28, 1984, and contributes to the intact historic village streetscape of this section of Mount Pleasant Road, as identified in the Midtown in Focus Planning Study.

¹ Breon, 2013.

On May 2, 2017, Toronto and East York Community Council requested Heritage Planning staff to report back to the Toronto and East York Community Council on the possibility of designating The Regent Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Staff have completed the Research and Evaluation Report for the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road and determined that the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act under all three categories of design and physical, historical and associative, and contextual values. As such, the property is a significant built heritage resource.

In June 2019, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108) received Royal Assent. Schedule 11 of this Act included amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act. The Bill 108 Amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act came into force on July 1, 2021, which included a shift in Part IV designations related to certain Planning Act applications. Section 29(1.2) of the Ontario Heritage Act now restricts City Council's ability to give notice of its intention to designate a property under the Act to within 90 days after the City Clerk gives notice of a complete application.

An application under the Ontario Building Code to partially but substantially demolish the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was submitted on June 13, 2022 and, as of the date of this report, is incomplete.

A Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report (CHER) dated August 26, 2022 was completed by ERA Architects Inc. in advance of any planning application and was submitted to support the demolition permit. A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is required for all development applications that affect listed and designated properties and will be considered when determining how a heritage property is to be conserved. Designation also enables City Council to review proposed alterations or demolitions to the property and enforce heritage property standards and maintenance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning recommends that:

1. City Council state its intention to designate the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road (including the active entrances at 549, 553 and 555 Mount Pleasant Road) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act in accordance with the Statement of Significance; 551 Mount Pleasant Road (Reasons for Designation) attached as Attachment 3, to the report, August 31, 2022, from the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning;
2. If there are no objections to the designation, City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the Bill in Council designating the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was included on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register on May 28, 1984.

On May 2, 2017, Toronto and East York Community Council adopted item TE24.91, recommending the Senior Manager, Heritage Preservation Services, to report back to the Toronto and East York Community Council on the possibility of designating The Regent Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.TE24.91>

On October 2, 2017, City Council adopted the recommendation to list over 250 properties within the Midtown in Focus study area on the City's Heritage Register, including properties along the east side of Mount Pleasant Road. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.PG22.5>

On July 23, 2018, City Council adopted, with amendments, the Midtown in Focus: Final Report recommending the adoption, with amendments, of Official Plan Amendment 405, including Schedule III, the Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan. At this meeting, Council also recommended the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to undertake a study of the Glebe Manor Estates from Yonge Street to Bayview and from Millwood Road to Manor Road as a potential Heritage Conservation District under Section 40.(1) of the Ontario Heritage Act (Recommendation 10). At this meeting, City Council also directed the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to prepare heritage guidelines and/or best practices for development on a main street property listed on the City's Heritage Register or properties with potential cultural heritage value located in the Midtown Villages and identified on Map 21-10 of Attachment 1 to the report (May 24, 2018) Chief Planner and Executive Director,

BACKGROUND

Heritage Planning Framework

The conservation of cultural heritage resources is an integral component of good planning, contributing to a sense of place, economic prosperity, and healthy and equitable communities. Heritage conservation in Ontario is identified as a provincial interest under the Planning Act. Cultural heritage resources are considered irreplaceable and valuable assets that must be wisely protected and managed as part of planning for future growth under the Provincial Policy Statement (2020) and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020). Heritage Conservation is

enabled through the Ontario Heritage Act. The City of Toronto's Official Plan implements the provincial policy regime, the Planning Act, the Ontario Heritage Act and provides policies to guide decision making within the city.

Good planning within the provincial and municipal policy framework has at its foundation an understanding and appreciation for places of historic significance, and ensures the conservation of these resources are to be balanced with other provincial interests. Heritage resources may include buildings, structures, monuments, and geographic areas that have cultural heritage value or interest to a community, including an Indigenous community.

The Planning Act establishes the foundation for land use planning in Ontario, describing how land can be controlled and by whom. Section 2 of the Planning Act identifies heritage conservation as a matter of provincial interest and directs that municipalities shall have regard to the conservation of features of significant architectural, historical, archaeological or scientific interest. Heritage conservation contributes to other matters of provincial interest, including the promotion of built form that is well-designed, and that encourages a sense of place.

The Planning Act requires that all decisions affecting land use planning matters shall conform to the Growth Plan and shall be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, both of which position heritage as a key component in supporting key provincial principles and interests.

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13>

The Provincial Policy Statement provides policy direction on land use planning in Ontario and is to be used by municipalities in the development of their official plans and to guide and inform decisions on planning matters, which shall be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement. The Provincial Policy Statement articulates how and why heritage conservation is a component of good planning, explicitly requiring the conservation of cultural heritage and archaeological resources, alongside the pursuit of other provincial interests. The Provincial Policy Statement does so by linking heritage conservation to key policy directives, including building strong healthy communities, the wise use and management of resources, and protecting health and safety.

Section 1.1 Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient and Resilient Development states that long-term economic prosperity is supported by, among other considerations, the promotion of well-designed built form and cultural planning, and the conservation of features that help define character. Section 2.6 Cultural Heritage and Archaeology subsequently directs that "significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved". Through the definition of conserved, built heritage resources, cultural heritage landscape and protected heritage property, the Provincial Policy Statement identifies the Ontario Heritage Act as the primary legislation through which heritage conservation will be implemented.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/provincial-policy-statement-2020>

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020) builds on the Provincial Policy Statement to establish a land use planning framework that supports complete communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment and social

equity. Section 1.2.1 Guiding Principles states that policies in the plan seek to, among other principles, "conserve and promote cultural heritage resources to support the social, economic, and cultural well-being of all communities, including First Nations and Metis communities". Cultural heritage resources are understood as being irreplaceable, and are significant features that provide people with a sense of place. Section 4.2.7 Cultural Heritage Resources directs that cultural heritage resources will be conserved in order to foster a sense of place and benefit communities, particularly in strategic growth areas.

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/place-grow-growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe>

The Ontario Heritage Act is the key provincial legislation for the conservation of cultural heritage resources in Ontario. It regulates, among other things, how municipal councils can identify and protect heritage resources, including archaeology, within municipal boundaries. This is largely achieved through listing on the City's Heritage Register, designation of individual properties under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, or designation of districts under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Section 27 of the Ontario Heritage Act gives municipalities the authority to maintain and add to a publicly accessible heritage register. The City of Toronto's Heritage Register includes individual heritage properties that have been designated under Part IV, Section 29, properties in a heritage conservation district designated under Part V, Section 41 of the Act as well as properties that have not been designated but City Council believes to be of "cultural heritage value or interest."

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o18>

Ontario Regulation 9/06 sets out the criteria for evaluating properties to be designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The criteria are based on an evaluation of design/physical value, historical and associative value and contextual value. A property may be designated under section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/060009>

The Ontario Heritage Toolkit provides guidance on designating properties of municipal significance, including direction on the purpose of designating heritage properties and information about how the Provincial Policy Statement and the Ontario Heritage Act provide a framework for the conservation of heritage properties within the land use planning system. In June 2019, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108) received Royal Assent. Schedule 11 of this Act included amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA). The Bill 108 Amendments to the OHA came into force on July 1, 2021, which included, amongst other matters, amendments to the listing and designation processes. Guidance from the Province related to the implementation of Bill 108 Amendments is forthcoming.

[Ontario Heritage Tool Kit \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.gov.on.ca)

The City of Toronto's Official Plan contains a number of policies related to properties on the City's Heritage Register and properties adjacent to them, as well as the protection of areas of archaeological potential. Indicating the integral role that heritage conservation plays in successful city-building, Section 3.1.5 of the Official Plan states that, "Cultural

heritage is an important component of sustainable development and place making. The preservation of our cultural heritage is essential to the character of this urban and liveable City that can contribute to other social, cultural, economic and environmental goals of the City.”

Policy 3.1.5.4 states that heritage resources on the City's Heritage Register "will be conserved and maintained consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, as revised from time to time and adopted by Council."

Policy 3.1.5.6 encourages the adaptive re-use of heritage properties while Policy 3.1.5.26 states that, when new construction on, or adjacent to, a property on the Heritage Register does occur, it will be designed to conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of that property and will mitigate visual and physical impacts on it.

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/official-plan/>

<https://www.historicplaces.ca/media/18072/81468-parks-s+g-eng-web2.pdf>

COMMENTS

While the research and evaluation of the property referenced above is, in staff's determination, sufficient to support the designation of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road, it should be noted that public access to the City of Toronto Archives remained limited during the preparation of this report due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic e.g. Research Hall is open on an appointment basis only, at a limited capacity, and that new and additional relevant information on the subject property further expanding on its heritage value may be forthcoming following increased access to these archival records and may provide further information to be incorporated in the final version of a Part IV designation by-law.

The subject property's heritage nomination was supported by the North York Community Preservation Panel, the local Councillor, and the North Toronto Historical Society.

The property is located in the historic village streetscape of the Mount Pleasant South Character Area in the Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan (Amendment 405 to the Official Plan of the City of Toronto). Within OPA 405, section 1.3.2. Midtown Villages states that "the Midtown Villages are historic main streets that will continue to be vital retail and service destinations for residents, workers and visitors. These areas will accommodate a mix of uses in well-proportioned buildings that appropriately conserve heritage resources. Buildings will reinforce the local character of these main streets by providing narrow retail frontages, frequent entrances and active uses at grade. Their design will

complement planned public realm improvements, resulting in comfortable, attractive and accessible public spaces that support civic and community life." ²

The subject property is also located in the Council authorized study area of the Glebe Manor Estates, which is bounded by Yonge Street, Bayview Avenue, Millwood Road and Manor Road as a potential Heritage Conservation District.

On January 22, 2018, Save the Regent Theatre, a forum hosted by the local Councillor with participation from the vice-chair of the Toronto and East York Community Preservation Panel, was attended by more than 100 community members. The public event was held at Greenwood College School to brainstorm ideas to save the Mount Pleasant Village landmark.

The Regent Theatre was sold in 2022 and the new owner proposes to continue its cultural use as a theatre for live performances.

Heritage Planning staff had the opportunity of two site visits to examine the interior of the building. A Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report (CHER) dated August 26, 2022 was completed by ERA Architects Inc. and was submitted to the City to support the demolition application.

² The Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan is available on the City of Toronto Website:
https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/96a5-CityPlanning_OPA405.pdf

551 Mount Pleasant Road

Research and Evaluation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06



View of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant looking east (Heritage Planning, 2022)

1. DESCRIPTION

551 Mount Pleasant Road - Regent Theatre	
ADDRESS	551 Mount Pleasant Road 549, 553, 555 Mount Pleasant Road (entrance addresses)
WARD	Don Valley West - Ward 15
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	PLAN 1787 PT LOTS 10 & 11
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Mount Pleasant East ³ ; Yonge-Eglinton Secondary Plan Area
HISTORICAL NAME	1927-1951: Belsize Theatre 1951-1988: Crest Theatre 1988-Present: Regent Theatre
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1927
ORIGINAL OWNER	Famous Players Canada
ORIGINAL USE	Theatre/Commercial

³ As defined by City of Toronto Neighbourhoods map and profiles

CURRENT USE*	Vacant *This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	Architect: Murray Brown; 1950 Alterations: Kaplan and Sprachman
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	See Section 2
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	See Section 2
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	See Section 2
CRITERIA	Design/Physical, Historical/Associative, Contextual
HERITAGE STATUS	Listed
RECORDER	Heritage Planning: Megan Albinger
REPORT DATE	August 2022

2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation section of the report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road, and applies evaluation criteria as set out in Ontario Regulation 9/06, under the headings of historical/associative, design/physical and contextual value to determine whether it merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest. The application of the criteria is found in Section 3 (Evaluation Checklist). The conclusions of the research and evaluation are found in the Conclusion of the report. Maps and Photographs are located in Attachment 1. The archival and contemporary sources for the research are found in Attachment 2. The Statement of Significance is contained in Attachment 3.

i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Key Date	Historical Event
	The area now known as the City of Toronto is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit (1805), and the Williams Treaties (1923) signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.
1793	The Town of York is founded and the area between present-day Bloor Street and Steeles Avenue was divided into 200-acre farm lots.
1836	The Crown patents the land of Lot 17, Concession III (from the Bay) to the Rectory of St. James.
1871	The Synod of the Diocese of Toronto registers Plan of Subdivision 306.
1876	Mount Pleasant Cemetery opens.

1885	The Metropolitan Street Railway Company was created and provided freight and passenger service along Yonge Street. This helped spur residential development of the area.
1889-90	The villages of Davisville and Eglinton were merged to create the Town of North Toronto. Construction begins on the Toronto Belt Line.
1912	North Toronto was annexed to the City of Toronto, the Clergy Reserve between Yonge Street and Bayview Avenue was subdivided as the Glebe Manor Estate and Mount Pleasant Road opened.
1925	Streetcar tracks are laid along Mount Pleasant Road from St Clair Avenue to Eglinton Avenue.
1927	The Belsize Theatre is constructed as part of the Famous Players chain of motion picture theatres. Its opening night showing of "It" featuring Clara Bow, was sold out and included the local mayor in attendance.
1942	The front entrance is altered for the first time.
1950-51	The theatre undergoes renovations to the designs of Kaplan and Sprachman. The lobby and foyer are substantially altered. A photograph from 1951 shows the building has a new name: the "Crest Theatre".
1953	Murray and Donald Davis sign a two-year lease with the intention of opening a live performance venue at 551 Mount Pleasant Road. Renovations are made to the stage area and parts of the lobby and foyer.
1954	The first production of the Crest Theatre opens January 5, 1954.
1966	The Crest Theatre company hosts its last live theatre performance in April, 1966. The property is quickly renovated to make the building suitable for showing films.
1976	Mount Pleasant streetcar route ceases operation. The building is purchased by a company led by Norman Stern and Peter Sorok.
1984	The property is listed on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register.
1985	The building undergoes renovations to upgrade the electrical and plumbing systems to facilitate live performance. The gold accents in the auditorium are restored, and the house is painted in a deep burgundy colour. Only one production (The Little Shop of Horrors) is hosted at the theatre.
1988	The building is leased by Famous Players Canada, and reopens as a cinema, under the name Regent Theatre.
2002	A collaboration with Theatre D Digital leads to installation of film editing and post-production equipment on site.
2020-22	The Regent Theatre closes due to the Covid-19 pandemic and is purchased by Terra Bruce Productions.

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The following section outlines the history and facts related to the properties which are the basis for determining 'Historical and Associative Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

North Toronto and Glebe Manor Estate

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road occupies a large lot spanning between the east side of Mount Pleasant Road and the west side of Hadley Road, north of Belsize Drive (Figures 1-2). It is located within midtown Toronto, east of the historic Davisville neighbourhood, which developed around the intersection of Yonge Street and Davisville Avenue. Davisville was originally known as Davis Corners, named for John Davis (1813-1899), who first purchased property in the area in 1845. Although he had trained as a school teacher, upon his arrival to Toronto he worked as a bookkeeper, took over a pottery business, established a local church, and also served as the local postmaster and a school trustee.

In 1889 Davisville and Eglinton, a community to the immediate north, were incorporated as the Village of North Toronto, with Mount Pleasant Cemetery forming a natural separation between North Toronto and other neighbourhoods to the south.⁴ In 1890, construction began on the Belt Line Railway, a commuter circuit that ran along the ravine, cutting across the cemetery grounds to run along its northern edge before turning in a northwest direction through Forest Hill (Figure 3). The enterprise was short-lived; the Belt Line survived only a few years before ending passenger service in 1894. Although portions of the line were abandoned at that time, other sections were repurposed for freight service, effectively reinforcing the southern boundary of the neighbourhood.

The majority of the land between the communities of Davisville and Eglinton, where the subject property is located, remained undeveloped for a relatively long period. Lot 17, Concession III (between what is today Joseph Avenue and Manor Road), had originally been granted by patent from the Crown to the Rectory of St James in 1836, and was set aside as a Clergy Reserve. The first major change to occur on the Clergy Reserve was the construction of Mount Pleasant Road beginning in 1910. In March 1912, Augustus George Cuthbert Dinnick and the Land Corporation of Ontario purchased all of the lots within the Clergy Reserve. He partnered with his brother, Wilfrid Servington Dinnick, who was also involved in real estate as the head of the Dovercourt Land, Building and Savings Company, to hire British engineer Walter S. Brooke to lay out a new subdivision. Plans 1787, 1788, and 1789 were registered in October 1912, and lots within were advertised for sale as part of the "Glebe Manor Estate" (Figure 4).

The properties closest to Yonge Street were the first to be developed over the next decade. In 1922, a trolley bus route opened along Merton Street, turning north on Mount Pleasant Road up to Eglinton Avenue. This was replaced by streetcar service a few years later in 1925, when tracks were laid in the roadway (Figure 5). For Mount Pleasant Road, this was transformative. Directories show that all lots fronting Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive and Manor Road were undeveloped prior to 1927. By the following year, over 20 addresses on the east side and nine addresses on the west side of the street appear in the 1928 directory, indicating that a majority of the block was constructed within the same year. One of the properties constructed in 1927 was a theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road (Figure 5).

⁴ The Village of North Toronto incorporated as a town one year later in 1890, with the addition of Bedford Park.

551 Mount Pleasant Road - The Belsize/Crest/Regent Theatre

Initially named The Belsize Theatre, the building hosted its first show on March 17, 1927. It was owned and operated by Famous Players Canada and reportedly constructed at a cost of \$160,000⁵ to the designs of local architect Murray Brown (see following section). Erected during a transitional period in the entertainment industry, the theatre was designed to play both moving pictures and host live performance, which it did during its early years of operation. The Belsize Theatre was part of a wave of theatres that were opened during the 1920s-1940s, catering to local neighbourhood audiences. Although some theatres were conversions from pre-existing storefronts, many – including the Belsize Theatre – were purpose-built. Despite the immense popularity of film, the introduction of the television and increasingly inadequate parking facilities were two factors that led to a general decline in attendance starting in the late 1940s, resulting in the closure of many smaller cinemas located on neighbourhood main streets; survival was dependent on being able to attract a consistent audience. In 1950, the Belsize Theatre closed for renovations and reopened with a new name – the Crest Theatre (Figure 7).

The new Crest Theatre did not show movies for very long. In 1953, brothers Murray and Donald Davis signed a two year lease with Famous Players Canadian Corporation Ltd. with the intent to open a live performance venue. In part, they were attracted by the fact that the theatre had originally been built to accommodate stage productions and therefore still had some of the necessary infrastructure in place,⁶ although they always had the eventual intention of constructing a new building. The location, distinctly outside the downtown entertainment district, also supported their philosophy that live theatre was for everyone, not just the upper class.

The Davis brothers issued a public sale of stock within one week of signing their lease on the space to help raise capital. Their older sister, Barbara Chilcott, also provided financial support to the new venture, and would feature in several of their productions alongside her brothers. At the time, the business model of a professional repertory theatre company with permanent, year-round premises was unique in Canada.⁷ It ran a new show approximately every two weeks, and also hosted the Spring Thaw (a popular annual revue that satirized Canadian politics, sports, and popular culture) several times during the early 1960s. The objective of the repertory theatre was to provide opportunity to Canadian talent, and on that account it was very successful. Over the thirteen seasons that the Crest Theatre ran, it helped to establish the careers of many in the performing arts, including Charmion King, Richard Monette, Martha Henry, Frances Hyland, Barbara Hamilton, Robertson Davies, Mavor Moore, Barry Morse, Marilyn Lightstone, Bruno Gerussi, Kate Reid, and Gordon Pinsent (Figures 8-9). Through their associated touring company established in the early 1960s, the Crest Hour Theatre, they also brought Canadian theatre to high school students across the province.

⁵ *Toronto Daily Star*, 1927. According to the Bank of Canada, this would equate to approximately \$2.7 million in 2022, when adjusted for inflation.

⁶ Illidge, p.32.

⁷ The Stratford Festival opened six months earlier than the Crest Theatre, but the key difference was the length of the season. The Royal Alexandra, in downtown Toronto, was a year-round venue for legitimate theatre, but it hosted traveling productions rather than hosting a permanent company.

Although the completion of the Yonge Street Subway line in 1954 made it easier to access the location, the theatre struggled at times with attendance and ultimately was not financially viable in the long term. When the National Arts Council declined to offer a grant for the 1964-65 season, the company nearly collapsed. Although the grant was reinstated the following year, the financial situation did not improve, and 1966 would be the final curtain call for the Crest Theatre Company. A few months after the last show was held in the spring of 1966, Famous Players repurposed the building back into a cinema. Despite the financial troubles and the eventual closure of the Crest playhouse, the conversion of the theatre to a live performance venue may have helped ensure the theatre's continued existence by ensuring an active use during the critical time period in the 1950s-60s when television caused a widespread drop in cinema attendance.

In 1976, the property was purchased by a company led by Norman Stern and Peter Sorok and operated as an independent theatre showing second-run films.⁸ For a brief period in the 1980s, it appeared as though the site would be revived as a live performance venue. In 1985, a production of *The Little Shop of Horrors* opened on the Crest Theatre stage. Although it was well received by critics, it was not a financial success, and subsequent attempts to lease the theatre to a non-profit musical theatre company also failed to materialize.⁹ In 1988, the building was leased by Famous Players, and renamed the Regent Theatre. In 2002, the postproduction and film editing company Theatre D leased the space, continuing the evolution of the space as a major contributor to the Canadian performing arts and entertainment industry. The property was most recently sold in 2022.

Murray Brown

Murray Brown (1884-1958) was born near Dundee, Scotland. At 16, he began his architectural education, first attending classes at University College of Dundee and apprenticing at a local firm, and later moving to London, England in 1907 to work in the office of W. R. Davidson and to attend the Royal Academy. Brown then immigrated to Canada in 1914, and found work with Charles S. Cobb in Toronto. After Cobb left Canada in the early 1920s and relocated to California, Brown entered into his own practice. Several of Brown's earliest commissions were banks and private residences, similar to the portfolio of work that Cobb is most associated with. However, his work expanded to include a number of other commercial buildings, including a series of theatres constructed between 1926 and 1939 that he became most well-known for. His skillful adoption of the art deco style for many of his buildings, including some of his theatres, earned him recognition from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC).

His projects included several theatres for the Capitol Theatre Company in Ontario, Saskatoon and Halifax. At this time, the entertainment businesses was undergoing an exciting transition from silent films to "talkies". One of the concurrent trends in theatre design was the introduction of "atmospheric theatres", often credited to the work of American architect John Eberson. These theatres used ornate detailing, plasterwork, and stage design techniques to transform the auditorium space and create an illusion

⁸ Roseman, Ellen, July 13, 1977, p.A18.

⁹ Conlogue, Ray, February 10, 1987, p.C7.

for the theatregoer that they were in another location. References to European and medieval-era sources were common themes. The Capitol Theatre buildings in Saskatoon (1928-29), Halifax (1929-30), and Port Hope, Ontario (1930) were all designed by Murray Brown as atmospheric theatres, though only the Port Hope Theatre survives today. Its design evokes a "Norman Castle" courtyard and it was designated municipally under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1989, and as a National Historic Site in 2016. Often, the exterior of the building reflected the theme used on the interior, though not always. Designed in 1926, the Belsize Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was Brown's first theatre project, and it more strongly reflects the classic opulence of traditional theatre architecture. However, both types of theatre designs relied heavily on the sculptural use of plaster and the ability to weave together eclectic architectural influences, indicating a clear lineage between his later work and his early theatre designs.¹⁰

In his later career, he continued to work on a variety of projects. In 1930, Brown was commissioned by the Department of Public Works of Canada's architecture branch to design Postal Station 'K' in Toronto (designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in 2013), which became one of his most celebrated works. In 1945, Brown invited his associate and chief draftsman A. G. Elton to partner with him, an association that lasted until Brown's death in 1958. Together, they designed a number of public schools and other commercial buildings. Murray Brown served on the RAIC council and numerous committees, and also as the Ontario Association of Architects president from 1935-36 (Figure 10). His dedication to the profession and his contributions to architecture in the Province earned him inclusion on the Ontario Association of Architects' Honor Roll.

Kaplan and Sprachman

The architectural firm of Kaplan and Sprachman led the renovation of the Belsize Theatre into the Crest Theatre in 1950, to which many extant features on the exterior and interior of the building can be dated including the reconfiguration of the entrance and the marquee and canopy.¹¹

Led by partners Harold Kaplan (1895-1973) and Abraham Sprachman (1894-1971), the company designed between seventy and eighty percent of all movie theatres in Canada between 1919 and 1950,¹² amounting to hundreds of projects comprising new buildings and renovations of existing theatres. They are most well known for their use of the Art Deco style as well as the popularization of the Art Moderne style, which is characterised by sleek curves and aerodynamic forms. Among their work in Toronto, the Eglinton Theatre, designed in 1934 is their most well-known; it was designated Part IV under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2004 and is also a National Historic Site of Canada. Other

10 The Bedford Theatre (later Park Theatre), at 3291 Yonge Street near Glenforest Road, was also designed in 1927 by Murray Brown. It is not considered to be an example of atmospheric design, but the Spanish or Mediterranean influence evident in its exterior and lobby, were a common source of inspiration for later atmospheric cinemas, including Brown's Capitol Theatre in Saskatoon.

11 On the architectural drawings, it is indicated that the design of the marquee and canopy were by others, not by Kaplan and Sprachman.

12 City of Toronto Archives, Mandel Sprachman Fonds

notable projects in Toronto by Kaplan and Sprachman include the Allenby (1936) and the Bloordale (1937) theatres. Mandel Sprachman (Abraham's son), also worked for the firm until he left to establish his own practice in 1958. Correspondence from Mandel Sprachman indicates that Kaplan and Sprachman saw Murray Brown as a competitor to their work, although their firm was far more dominant than Brown, who shifted away from designing theatres after the 1930s.¹³

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The following section provides an architectural description and analysis related to the property which will establish the basis for determining 'Design and Physical Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is a theatre building with a variety of stylistic influences, which is characteristic for this typology in this era. Like other small-time vaudeville theatres of the 1920s, the design of the building exhibits clear references to the grand downtown theatres constructed in the previous decade, both in exterior appearance and the organization and ornamentation of the interior spaces. However, unlike many of the other local neighbourhood venues, these design features were executed to a more lavish degree at the subject property.

551 Mount Pleasant: Exterior

In his drawings for the building, Murry Brown followed the tradition of earlier vaudeville theatres by employing a predominantly Classical design language, which was seen as a way to provide an air of respectability to the venue. The façade is very well integrated within its main street context, and is generally symmetrical in organization with only minor deviations at street level (Figure 11). The building is two stories where it meets the property line on Mount Pleasant Road (two and a half at the centre gable), rising an additional storey in the rear of the property to accommodate the auditorium (Figures 12-13). The higher value of the land fronting the main street resulted in many theatres to be designed to have a relatively narrow street presence with larger massing in the rear, facilitated through the consolidation of multiple lots or portions thereof.¹⁴ The façade of 551 Mount Pleasant is divided into three sections: a central portion flanked by two storefronts (Figure 14). The inclusion of retail units was common for smaller neighbourhood theatres built in the early 20th century, as the rental income provided a steady source of revenue for the business. The north, east, and south elevations are generally plain and without fenestration (Figures 15-17). The rear (east) elevation uses terra cotta hollow tile on the upper portions, presumably as a cheaper alternative to brick rather than as a design element.

The central portion of the primary (west) elevation, which comprises the entrance to theatre itself, is given prominence by projecting slightly from the rest of the façade and by incorporating several distinguishing architectural details. A gabled roof, originally

13 Sprachman, Mandel, Correspondence with Janet MacKinnon (Historic Theatres' Trust), 2000, held by City of Toronto Archives.

14 In many instances, the requirement to accommodate larger massing resulted in the auditoriums of early theatres to be oriented perpendicularly to the street frontage. However in the case of 551 Mount Pleasant, it was not necessary as the building was able to expand in a parallel direction to the rear.

clad in terra cotta tiles,¹⁵ rises a half storey above the continuous streetwall. The eaves on each side of the gable are ornamented by a series of four dentils and a thin stone cornice follows the roofline for the width of the elevation. Within the gable are two carved stone features including a crest bearing the letter "B", and a banner bearing a script reading "Belsize" (the theatre's original name) in capital lettering (Figure 18). Below these features on the second floor are three tall, round-arched windows, with stone hood moulds on the arched portions. A fluted keystone curves up and around the extrados of the hood moulds in the form of a scroll. Early photographs show that these windows were divided into two parts: an arched transom with radial muntins, and a rectangular lower portion containing two sash that operated in a double casement style, with 10 lites each (Figure 19). The original windows appear to have been replaced with a non-operable glazing between the 1960s and 1980s.

At ground level, the original design had three double door entrances aligned with the arched windows above, recessed from the property line and separated by thick piers. The present configuration of the entrance dates to 1950, when modifications were made as part of a renovation designed by Kaplan and Sprachman.¹⁶ The piers at the front of the building were removed and the entrance was recessed on a diagonal to the street, with five single tempered glass doors (Figure 20). Parallel to this diagonal, a second partition with a set of five kalamein doors was installed approximately ten feet towards the interior, creating a vestibule with a new box office behind a curved wood partition (Figure 21).¹⁷ Subsequent alterations did not introduce any additional changes to the exterior of the theatre entrance.

The central gabled portion of the west elevation sits between two flat-roofed side sections of equal width, which are modestly detailed and of the same two-storey height as the adjacent streetwall. On the second floor, two rectangular window openings per side originally contained double casement windows with 8 lites each. A continuous stone string course forms the lintel for the windows and connects to the arched hood moulds of the central bay. Several brick courses above the string course, unadorned rectangular stone panels the same width as the windows provide a restrained accent to the composition of the elevation, drawing on an architectural language introduced during the Renaissance period. The terra cotta tile coping on the parapet of the flat roof sections and the auditorium is still extant, and was indicated on the original design drawings. In keeping with the main street theatre typology, the storefronts in each side bay of 551 Mount Pleasant comprise a low bulkhead, glass display windows, and a recessed entrance, gently sloped to street level. The north unit (Figures 22-23) is narrower than the south storefront (Figure 24), to allow for an entrance to the upper floor, which originally functioned as separate office space, but in more recent history was connected to the interior of the theatre. This door is topped by a transom window,

15 The terra cotta roof was replaced with asphalt shingles at some point between 1986 and 1993.

16 The configuration of the front entrance was altered for the first time in 1942. The alterations were completed according to designs drawn up internally by the theatre engineering and maintenance department of Famous Players. The northernmost bay of doors was replaced with a box office for ticket sales, featuring black vitrolite surrounding an octagonal glass sales window, shell pink fluted decorative bands, and etched mirror glass. New glass display cases were added to the existing piers between the other sets of doors, which were also re-clad with black vitrolite.

17 Referred to as the "lobby" on the floor plans.

and distinguished by a wide stone surround.¹⁸ A series of three receding planes provides emphasis to the opening, while the decorative teardrop forms on the 'capitals' of the wide piers framing the opening maintains a unifying detail shared with the rest of the piers on the façade.¹⁹

Arguably the most iconic feature of the theatre typology is the marquee and signage that were used to advertise the scheduled entertainment. Recessed entry doors in combination with a projecting marquee created a fluid boundary between the public realm and the theatre, whereby this interstitial space could temporarily function as an extension of the theatre at busy times. Despite the important role they played in defining the typology and contributing to the overall look of the building, marquees were frequently designed independently of the rest of the building.²⁰ Presently, the west elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant is dominated by the projecting sign, canopy and marquee, which date to the 1988 and 1950 alterations respectively. The three-lobed canopy spans the entire width of the building including the storefronts, and replaced at least three earlier versions that were restrained to the centre bay. The marquee sits on top of the canopy and obscures significantly more of the façade than earlier iterations, which combined the functions of the marquee and canopy into one structure. The increased size also necessitated the installation of new wall-mounted chain rings below the upper cornice, though the original ones remain in place. A projecting sign bearing the name of the theatre has been located in the centre of the façade since initial construction. Archival photography shows that throughout the building's history, it has extended above the ridge line of the gable roof.

551 Mount Pleasant: Interior

As a result of the switching between live performance and film screenings, the building has undergone several interior renovations since its original construction in 1927. This is most evident in the front entrance and lobby area, which has seen numerous iterations reflecting the aesthetic trends of the time.

In Murray Brown's original design, the recessed entry doors opened up onto a rectangular lobby space with terrazzo flooring and ornate plasterwork on the walls and ceiling (Figure 25). Plaster and terra cotta were a relatively inexpensive way to achieve the lavish design schemes expected by theatre audiences, which were often unified throughout the interior. The Belsize Theatre incorporated several features within the plasterwork honouring the performing arts in both the lobby and auditorium. For example, incorporated within the frieze in the lobby were panels containing inscriptions that likely referenced the different genres of Greek theatre.²¹ The lobby ceiling had an

18 On-site investigations revealed that both the stone surround and transom window are extant, although partially obscured behind some hoarding.

19 Many of these details, including the capitals, are largely hidden behind the canopy and other hoarding, but some of the teardrop forms can be seen obliquely when viewed up close.

20 Herzog, p16. Murray Brown's original drawings do not include any drawings or details for the marquee, so it is unclear whether he was responsible for the slightly curved marquee that appears in the earliest archival photograph of the building.

21 An archival photograph of the north lobby wall is clear enough to show the words "Comedy" above one mirror, and "[...]edy" above the other, possibly the word "Tragedy". The other known archival photograph of the lobby, which shows part of the south wall, is not clear enough to allow the inscription to be legible.

astrological theme, incorporating a sun, stars, and medallions depicting representations of the signs of the zodiac (Figure 26), which were also used as a motif in Brown's design for the Bedford Theatre (1927) (Figures 27-28).²² The *Toronto Daily Star*, wrote a glowing report of the opulence of the theatre including the lobby area following opening night exclaiming: "One of the features of the theatre is the fine arcade entrance, lined with Venetian mirrors. The winding stairway is beautifully balustraded. The mezzanine is richly furnished with hand-wrought electroliers. Two exquisite friezes of "Carmen" the Spanish dancer, adorn the walls on either side [of the auditorium]."²³

Moving toward the interior, the lobby area was separated from a foyer by a partition with another set of three pairs of glass doors with glass transoms above. The foyer spanned the full width of the property behind the retail store units, containing two flanking stairwells to the upper level, washrooms for patrons, and an office for the theatre manager (Figure 29-30). Two round arched openings separated by a wall with an alcove provided access into the auditorium space beyond. The author of a 1927 publication entitled "*American Theatres of Today*", emphasized that the foyer was meant to entice the patron to keep exploring the space and move them through the lobby further into the interior, particularly by including staircases "suggestive of opportunities to lead one away from the crowd".²⁴ Both the upper and lower foyers featured checkered flooring and plaster imitations of ashlar stone walls (Figure 31-32).

Brown's design for the auditorium followed the tradition established by the earlier grand vaudeville theatres, but at a more modest scale. Each side wall featured a faux balcony with a wall mural filling a bas-relief arch as the focal point, with other small decorative panels, medallions, and details including satyr masks accenting each interior bay (Figures 33-36). Strips of ornamental plaster traversed the vaulted ceiling in a grid pattern, which also featured two ornate ceiling grilles. Carrying through the theme that was introduced in the lobby, inscriptions referencing the performing arts were also incorporated into the décor of the auditorium, including a Lord Byron quote above the proscenium arch (still extant) and the names of several personages associated with theatre around the perimeter of the ceiling.²⁵

The Kaplan and Sprachman-led renovation in 1950 that heavily modified the theatre's exterior entrance also resulted in significant alterations to the ground floor interior spaces. Aside from the creation of the new vestibule, the remaining area of the original lobby and the original foyer were combined into one larger space with the removal of the glass doors and transoms that had separated the two areas. A metal lath and plaster drop ceiling lowered the finished interior height of the space, carpet was installed

22 Astrology was becoming increasingly popular in the Americas in the early 1900s-1930s, and started to be represented in architecture, such as on the ceiling of Grand Central Station, New York (built 1913).

23 An electrolier is an elaborate light fixture. *Toronto Daily Star*, 1927.

24 Sexton, p.18.

25 Among the discernable inscriptions are 'Wilde' (likely in reference to Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), notable playwright); 'Irving' (likely for Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905), English stage actor and theatre manager); 'Booth' (likely a reference to Edwin Booth (1833-1893), renowned American stage actor); 'Gwyne' (possibly a reference to Nell Gwyn (1650-1687), popular English actress and mistress of King Charles II); and 'Terry' (possibly a reference to either Dame Ellen Terry (1847-1928), a leading English Shakespearean actress, or Terry's Theatre, constructed 1887 in London's west end).

to cover the original terrazzo, and the walls were covered with new drapery. A candy bar was installed between the two openings leading to the auditorium, but the openings themselves remained unaltered.

It is perhaps ironic that shortly after the 1950 renovations resulted in all of the interior references to the theatre arts and personages being covered up (mostly by drapery), the theatre was leased by the Davis brothers to become a live performance venue. Due to limited time and funds, their 1953 renovations were concentrated on the stage area and orchestra pit, and did not reverse any of the previous interior alterations. It is unknown to what extent anyone involved in the Crest playhouse was aware of the hidden tributes to earlier generations of theatre.

The dates of later alterations generally correspond to key events in the building's history and change of occupants: building permits for minor alterations date to 1966 when the building began showing films again, and to 1985 when the live performance production "The Little Shop of Horrors" briefly leased the space. The latter renovation was more substantial, although the majority of the available budget was used to upgrade plumbing and electrical systems, leaving little remaining for cosmetic improvements. A new ticket booth and wet bar were installed, but other existing interior finishes remained. An article in the *Globe and Mail* from this time indicates that efforts were made to "restore the gold leaf" in the auditorium and repaint it to a deep burgundy colour that exists today. The article also notes that although there was a desire to restore the original ornamental plaster ceiling in the lobby, concealed beneath the drop ceiling, no funds were available at that time to properly undertake the work.²⁶ In 2022, the interior finishes were stripped to reveal the partially intact plasterwork of the original ceiling, damaged by cumulative electrical and HVAC work.

iv. CONTEXT

The following section provides contextual information and analysis related to the property which is the basis for determining 'Contextual Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

551 Mount Pleasant Road is situated on the east side of the street, between Belsize Drive and Manor Road East (Figures 37-38). The built form of this section of Mount Pleasant Road represents the growth and change that occurred along the street in the 1920s, and is primarily characterized by low-scale, Edwardian-style commercial row buildings forming a continuous streetwall. It is part of the Glebe Manor Estate, a new subdivision laid out in 1910 featuring three linear boulevard parks along Belsize Avenue. The development was planned by the Dovercourt Land Building & Savings Company, and advertised as an investment opportunity, combining the "attractions of country life" with "city conveniences".²⁷ The earlier houses within the neighbourhood were built on spec starting with the lots closest to Yonge Street, and incorporated Arts and Crafts and Colonial Revival influences. Development on the east side of the subdivision accelerated after the trolley bus, and later streetcar line, began operating on Mount Pleasant Road in 1922 and 1925 respectively.

²⁶ Conlogue, Ray, *The Globe and Mail*, p.S9

²⁷ Dovercourt Land, Building, and Savings Company Ltd., 1914. Transcription by D. Fleming, 2018.

The Final Report for the Midtown in Focus Planning Study identified the section of Mount Pleasant Road between Millwood Road and Soudan Road as a Midtown Village, and made note of the "intact historic village streetscape" of the Mount Pleasant Village Character Area.²⁸ The narrow retail frontages, frequent entrances, and active uses at grade were identified as key components of the existing local main street character.

Furthermore, the distinguishable roofscape, marquee, and projecting signage identify the property as a movie theatre making it a recognizable local landmark on Mount Pleasant Road and in the North Toronto neighbourhood more broadly.

3. EVALUATION AND APPLICATION OF O.REG 9/06 CRITERIA

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the Ontario Heritage Act: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. The criteria are prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, and the City of Toronto also uses these criteria when assessing properties for inclusion on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register. There are three categories for a total of nine criteria under O. Reg 9/06. A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

The evaluation table is marked "N/A" if the criterion is "not applicable" to the property or "√" if it is applicable to the property, with explanatory text below.

DESIGN OR PHYSICAL VALUE

Design or Physical Value	
i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	√
ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	N/A
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	N/A

Rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method

The building at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is a representative example of an early 20th-century purpose-built vaudeville theatre along a neighbourhood main street, which were once common but are becoming increasingly rare. The two-storey scale at the property line with increased massing at the rear, the brick cladding with stone detailing, and the assimilation of the building into the contiguous commercial streetscape through the inclusion of two integrated storefronts are all characteristic of this typology. The use of Classical design language to project a sense of refinement is in keeping with the design tradition of vaudeville theatres, and is evident in the symmetrical arrangement of the façade, round-arched windows, and carved stone details. The roofline of the gabled centre bay flanked by flat-roofed sections to either side reinforces the focus on the marquee and projecting sign, which are also an integral part of the theatre typology. The design tradition of vaudeville theatre is also expressed on the interior of the building,

²⁸ See p.92 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-116456.pdf>

including the surviving lobby ceiling that remains a tangible link to the original spatial arrangement of the Belsize Theatre.

HISTORICAL OR ASSOCIATIVE VALUE

Historical or Associative Value	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	✓
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	N/A
iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	✓

Direct association with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community

The subject property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is valued for its association to the Crest Theatre (1953-1966), a highly influential repertory theatre company that helped to spotlight Canadian talent and establish the careers of a generation of theatre actors and playwrights. At the time the Crest Theatre was established, the Royal Alexandra Theatre was the only other permanent, year-round venue for live performance in the city, and the film industry was undergoing transition with the advent of television, leading many local cinemas to close. The Crest Theatre's founders, brothers Murray and Donald Davis, selected the theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant both for its location and because it had originally been constructed to host vaudeville entertainment, which facilitated the conversion to accommodate live performance. The Crest Hour Theatre, a touring company associated with the Crest Theatre, traveled to high schools across Ontario, further extending the cultural impact and legacy of the company.

Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community

The subject property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is also valued for its association with the architect Murray Brown (1884-1958). The Belsize Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was among the earliest of several theatres designed by Brown between 1926 and 1940. Brown is celebrated for his work on Canada's only surviving atmospheric theatre, the Capitol Theatre in Port Hope (1930) and Postal Station 'K' in Toronto (1936), and is a recipient of the Ontario Association of Architects' Honor Roll, which is only bestowed upon those who have made a significant contribution to the province's architectural heritage, either through their body of work or their influence in the wider community of design, education, and/or publication.

CONTEXTUAL VALUE

Contextual Value	
i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	✓
ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	✓
iii. landmark	✓

Important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area

Contextually, the predominantly two-storey height of the subject property, the delineated bays along the front elevation, and the ground floor storefronts with recessed entries serve to maintain the historical low-rise streetscape and consistent fine-grained rhythm of building frontages along Mount Pleasant Road between Davisville and Eglinton avenues. Located within the Glebe Manor Estate subdivision, the property supports the character of the area as it represents the early-20th century development of the neighbourhood as part of a prominent village main street in North Toronto.

Physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings

The building at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is historically, visually and physically linked to its setting, anchoring the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive to the south and Manor Road East to the north. It is part of a contiguous row of commercial buildings with a shared setback constructed during the late 1920s following the introduction of public transit along Mount Pleasant Road.

Landmark

The contextual value of the former Belsize/Crest/Regent Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant is also attributed to its role as a local landmark. The prominence of the building on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road is demonstrated through the larger massing at rear; gabled roofline and chimney that extend above the continuous streetwall height; and the projections into the public realm related to the building's historical use as a theatre, including a vertically-oriented sign at the second floor and a marquee and canopy above the front entrance, which have evolved over time.

CONCLUSION

Staff have completed the Research and Evaluation Report for the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road and determined that the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act under design/physical, historical/associative, and contextual values. As such, the property is a significant built heritage resource.

Constructed in 1927 according to the plans of Murray Brown, the subject property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road has cultural heritage value as a once common but increasingly rare example of an early 20th-century neighbourhood theatre. It is also valued as the premises of the renowned Crest Theatre (1954-1966), a repertory theatre company that helped to spotlight and establish the careers in the performing arts for a generation of Canadian talent. With the neighbouring heritage properties along Mount Pleasant Road, the subject property contributes to the historic main street character of the block between Belsize Drive to the south and Manor Road East to the north, and is a local landmark.

The Statement of Significance (Attachment 3) for 551 Mount Pleasant Road, comprises the Reasons for Designation, which is the Public Notice of Intention to Designate.

CONTACT

Megan Albinger
Heritage Planner, Heritage Planning
Urban Design, City Planning
Tel: 416-394-2789; Fax: 416-392-1973
E-mail:

SIGNATURE

Mary L. MacDonald, MA, CAHP
Senior Manager, Heritage Planning
Urban Design, City Planning

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Maps and Photographs
Attachment 2 – List of Research Sources
Attachment 3 – Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation)



Figure 1. Map showing the subject property's location outlined in red at 551 Mount Pleasant Road on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive and Manor Road East. This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundaries of the property are not shown (City of Toronto Mapping).



Figure 2. Aerial View (base image 2016) showing the location of the property spanning the block between Mount Pleasant Road and Hadley Road, north of Belsize Drive. The approximate boundary of the property is outlined in red (City of Toronto Mapping).



Figure 3. Goads Atlas (1903), showing the approximate location of the property within the Clergy Reserve. The map also shows the cluster of buildings near Yonge and Davisville, which was part of the Village of North Toronto at this time, and the Belt Line Railway crossing through Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

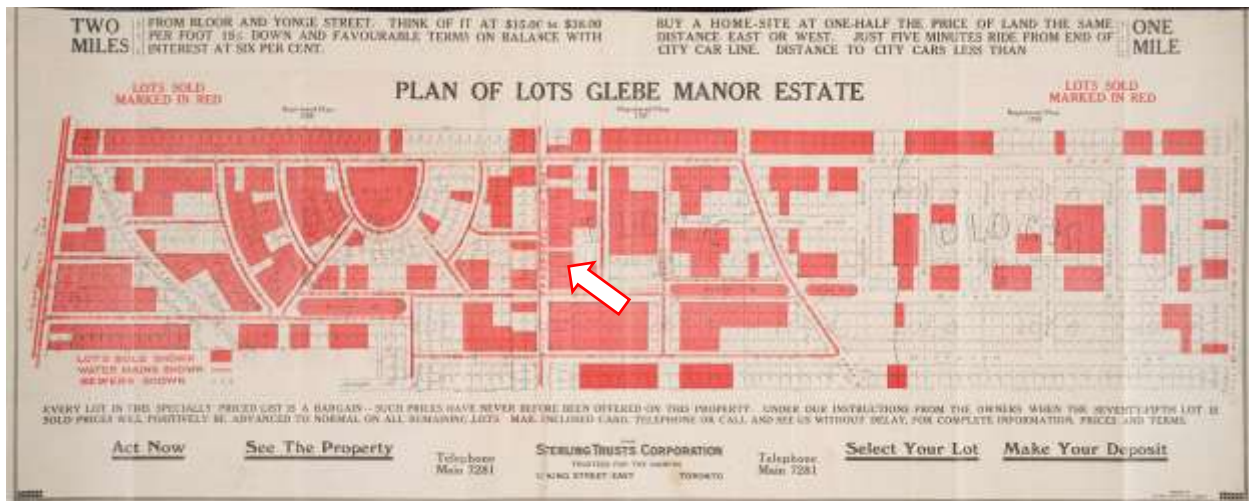


Figure 4. Plan of Lots of Glebe Manor Estate (1912). A "Proposed Car Line" on Mount Pleasant Road is indicated. The lots on which the Belsize Theatre would be built are indicated as sold, though nothing would be constructed for another fifteen years (Toronto Public Library).



4034 Mt Pleasant Rd. N. from Pelsize (Way) Sept. 10, 1925

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 16, Series 71, Item 4034

Figure 5. Archival image from 1925, showing Mount Pleasant Road looking north from Belsize Drive while the streetcar tracks are under construction. All the lots on both sides of Mount Pleasant remain unbuilt at this time (City of Toronto Archives).



Figure 6. Archival image from 1927 showing the building shortly after construction (Regent Theatre Archives via ERA).



Figure 7. Archival image from 1951 taken shortly after renovation work in 1950, showing the new name of the theatre on the projecting sign (City of Toronto Archives).



Figures 8 and 9. The Crest Theatre helped to establish the careers of many in the performing arts industry in Canada. Pictured at left, a man changes the marquee in November 1964 (Photographer John McNeill, Archives of Ontario); Pictured at right, photograph from a 1961 performance of *The Madwoman of Chaillot* featuring Charmion King, Barbara Chilcott, Bruno Gerussi, Barbara Hamilton, and Kate Reid (Photographer Robert Ragsdale, from *The Glass Cage*, p.87).



Figure 10. Archival photograph of the Committee in Charge of the Fourth Biennial Architectural Exhibition of the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Association of Architects. Murray Brown is pictured front row, second from right, between J. M. Lyle and E. R. Arthur, c.1932 (City of Toronto Archives).

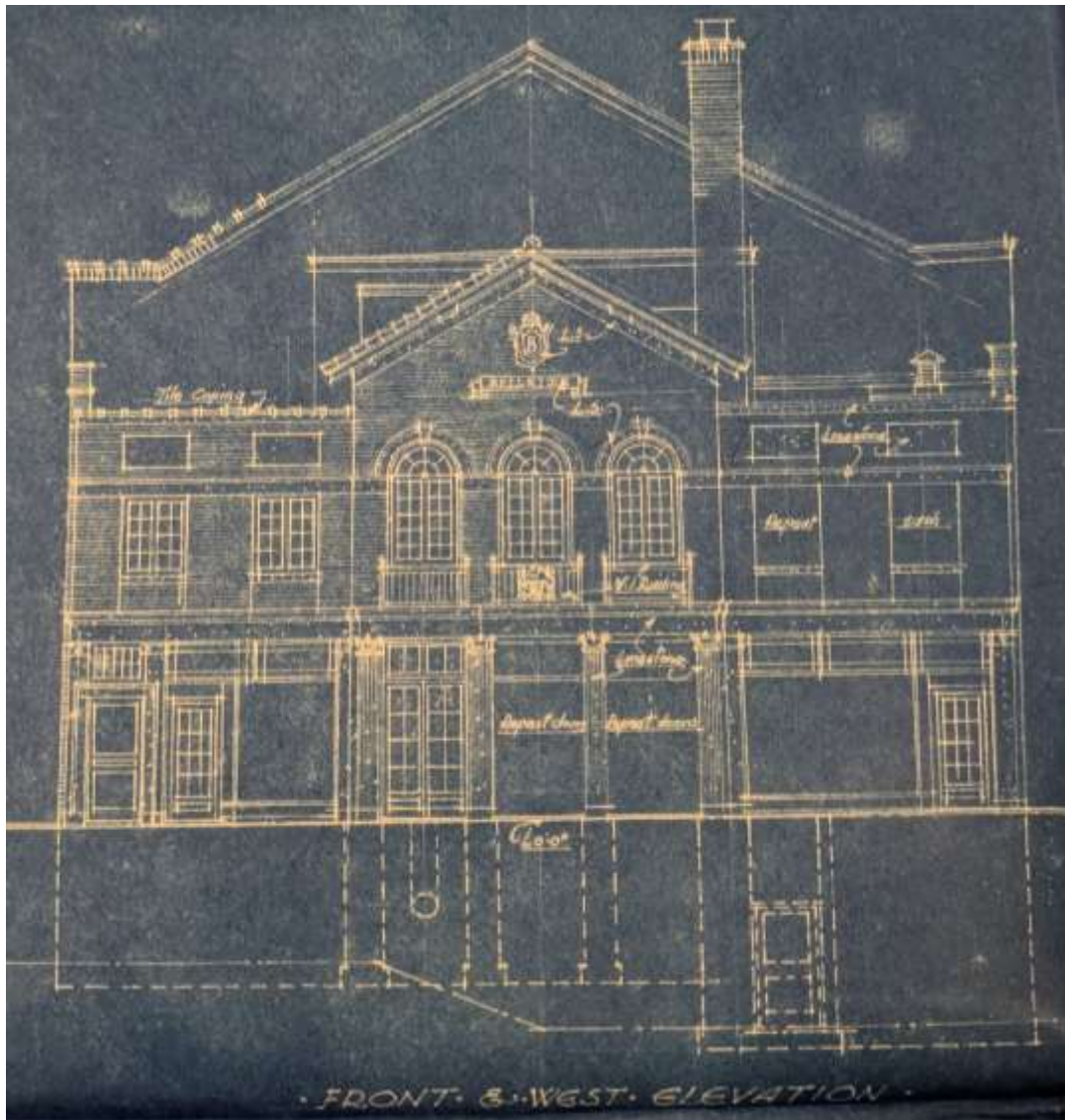


Figure 11. Murray Brown's original design for the front (West) elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant Road (Archives of Ontario).



Figure 12. Longitudinal section of the Belsize Theatre according to Murray Brown's original designs, showing the increased massing at the rear of the building (Archives of Ontario).



Figure 13. Crest Theatre, 1964, showing the terra cotta roof, rear massing, projecting sign, marquee and canopy (Toronto Star Archives via Toronto Public Library).



Figure 14. Principal (west) elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 15. Side (north) elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 16. Rear (east) elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant (Heritage Planning, 2022).



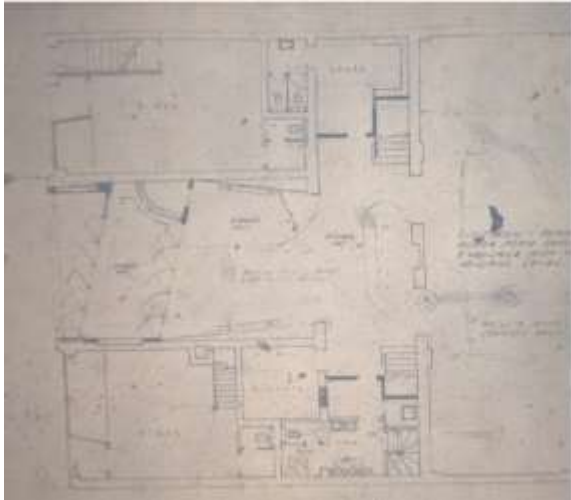
Figure 17. Composite of side (south) elevation of 551 Mount Pleasant (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 18. Detail of the front elevation, showing the carved stone crest and inscription (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 19. Archival image from 1942 showing the original casement windows, storefronts, and alterations to the front entrance and the third known iteration of the marquee and canopy. The front entrance was later redone in 1950 (Archives of Ontario).



Figures 20, 21. Left, detail from the floor plans for the 1950 renovations showing the alterations to the configuration of the front entrance and lobby (City of Toronto Building Records); Right, photograph of the extant front entrance (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figures 22, 23. Detail of the north storefront and entrance door surround with hoarding removed (Heritage Planning, 2022)



Figure 24. Detail of the south storefront (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 25. Archival photograph of the Lobby (City of Toronto Archives).



Figure 26. The original plaster ceiling, concealed for more than half a century, was revealed during on-site investigations in 2022 (Heritage Planning, 2022). The level of intactness varies throughout.



Figures 27, 28. Murray Brown's design for the Bedford Theatre featured the signs of the zodiac on both the exterior and interior (City of Toronto Archives).



Figures 29, 30. Left image c.1942, showing lower foyer (Archives of Ontario); Right image, lower foyer present condition (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figures 31, 32. Left image c.1942, showing upper foyer (Archives of Ontario); Right image, upper foyer present condition (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 33. Archival photograph of the auditorium of the Belsize Theatre looking towards the stage, c. 1942, showing the faux balconies, wall murals, and inscription above the proscenium (Archives of Ontario).



Figure 34. This image shows what remains of the north wall mural (one of two "friezes of Carmen, the Spanish dancer") and above, the inscription appearing to read "Terry" (a possible reference to actress Dame Ellen Terry). Much of the plasterwork on the auditorium walls has suffered damage and/or is missing as a result of previous renovations. (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 35. . Archival photograph of the auditorium of the Belsize Theatre looking towards the balcony, c. 1942, showing the vaulted ceiling, grilles, and inscriptions near the ceiling (Archives of Ontario).



Figure 36. Details of the plasterwork on the auditorium ceiling (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 37. View looking southeast towards 551 Mount Pleasant Road (Heritage Planning, 2022).



Figure 38. View looking northeast towards 551 Mount Pleasant Road (Heritage Planning, 2022).

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(ENTRANCE ADDRESSES AT 549, 553 AND 555 MOUNT PLEASANT ROAD)**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE****(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)**

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road (including entrance addresses at 549, 553 and 555 Mount Pleasant Road), 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 categories of design/physical, historical/associative and contextual value.

Description

The property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is situated in Toronto's midtown, on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive and Manor Road East. It contains the Regent Theatre, a neighbourhood theatre from the interwar era that was constructed in 1927 to the designs of architect Murray Brown. Originally named the Belsize Theatre, it opened as part of the Famous Players chain and was designed to host both vaudeville and film entertainment. The physical presence of both stage and screen facilitated the adaptation between the two mediums on more than one occasion since the building's initial construction, contributing to its longevity as a community asset. The distinguishable roofscape of the brick and stone building, the marquee, and the projecting signage identify the property as a theatre, making it a recognizable local landmark. The property includes two integrated storefronts on the principal elevation, contributing to the intact historic village streetscape of this section of Mount Pleasant Road, as identified in the Midtown in Focus Planning Study. The property was listed on the City's Heritage Register in 1984.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The building at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is a representative example of an early 20th-century purpose-built vaudeville theatre along a neighbourhood main street, which were once common but are becoming increasingly rare. The two-storey scale at the property line with increased massing at the rear, the brick cladding with stone detailing, and the assimilation of the building into the contiguous commercial streetscape through the inclusion of two integrated storefronts are all characteristic of this typology. The use of Classical design language to project a sense of refinement is in keeping with the design tradition of vaudeville theatres, and is evident in the symmetrical arrangement of the façade, round-arched windows, and carved stone details. The roofline of the gabled centre bay flanked by flat-roofed sections to either side reinforces the focus on the marquee and projecting sign, which are also an integral part of the theatre typology. The design tradition of vaudeville theatre is also expressed on the interior of the building, including the surviving lobby ceiling that remains a tangible link to the original spatial arrangement and interior ornamentation of the Belsize Theatre.

The subject property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is valued for its association to the Crest Theatre (1953-1966), a highly influential repertory theatre company that helped to spotlight Canadian talent and establish the careers of a generation of theatre actors and playwrights. At the time the Crest Theatre was established, the Royal Alexandra Theatre was the only other permanent, year-round venue for live performance in the city, and the film industry was undergoing transition with the advent of television, leading many local cinemas to close. The Crest Theatre's founders, brothers Murray and Donald Davis, selected the theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant both for its location and because it had originally been constructed to host vaudeville entertainment, which facilitated the conversion to accommodate live performance. The Crest Hour Theatre, a touring company associated with the Crest Theatre, traveled to high schools across Ontario, further extending the cultural impact and legacy of the company.

The subject property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is also valued for its association with the architect Murray Brown (1884-1958). The Belsize Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant Road was among the earliest of several theatres designed by Brown between 1926 and 1940. Brown is celebrated for his work on Canada's only surviving atmospheric theatre, the Capitol Theatre in Port Hope (1930) and Postal Station 'K' in Toronto (1936), and is a recipient of the Ontario Association of Architects' Honor Roll, which is only bestowed upon those who have made a significant contribution to the province's architectural heritage, either through their body of work or their influence in the wider community of design, education, and/or publication.

Contextually, the predominantly two-storey height of the subject property, the delineated bays along the front elevation, and the ground floor storefronts with recessed entries serve to maintain the historical low-rise streetscape and consistent fine-grained rhythm of building frontages along Mount Pleasant Road between Davisville and Eglinton avenues. Located within the Glebe Manor Estate subdivision, the property supports the character of the area as it represents the early-20th century development of the neighbourhood as part of a prominent village main street in North Toronto.

The building at 551 Mount Pleasant Road is historically, visually and physically linked to its setting, anchoring the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive to the south and Manor Road East to the north. It is part of a contiguous row of commercial buildings with a shared setback constructed during the late 1920s following the introduction of public transit along Mount Pleasant Road.

The contextual value of the former Belsize/Crest/Regent Theatre at 551 Mount Pleasant is also attributed to its role as a local landmark. The prominence of the building on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road is demonstrated through the larger massing at rear; gabled roofline and chimney that extend above the continuous streetwall height; and the projections into the public realm related to the building's historical use as a theatre, including a vertically-oriented sign at the second floor and a marquee and canopy above the front entrance, which have evolved over time.

Heritage Attributes

Design or Physical Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road as an early 20th-century purpose-built neighbourhood vaudeville theatre.

Exterior Attributes:

- The scale, form, and massing of the property as a two-storey building with a taller centre bay and increased massing at the rear
- The property's material palette, consisting of brick with stone detailing
- On the west (primary) elevation:
 - The gabled roof, chimney, and slight projection of the central bay, which rise above the continuous streetwall, giving prominence to the building
 - The wide dentils on the eaves of the gabled roof on the primary elevation
 - The tile coping on the parapet of the flat roofed portions of the property to either side of the gabled central bay
 - The continuous stone cornice that follows the roofline for the width of the elevation
 - The stone crest with the stylized letter "B" and the stone inscription panel reading "Belsize", in reference to the original name of the building
 - The four smooth, stone panels above the flat-headed window openings on the second floor
 - The original fenestration openings on the second level of the principal (west) elevation where there are two flat-headed window openings above each storefront, and three round-arched openings in the central bay above the theatre entrance
 - The stone hood moulds above the round-arched openings, with their fluted keystones that curve around the extrados in the form of a scroll
 - The stone lintels and string course above the flat-headed openings, which form a continuous band across the façade in conjunction with the hood moulds above the round-arched openings.
 - The presence and placement of a projecting sign aligning with the ridgeline of the gable roof reading the name of the theatre in combination with a marquee and canopy above the theatre entrance (historically supported by chains)
 - The placement of the main entrance doors in the centre of the primary elevation, slightly recessed from the property line
 - The two storefronts, with their composition comprising a low bulkhead, large glass display windows, recessed entrances that slope to the level of the sidewalk, and stone cornice above
 - The building's asymmetrical composition at the ground floor with a narrower storefront on the north bay allowing an entrance to the upper floor
 - The stone detailing on the extant piers including the 'teardrop' forms on the capitals
 - The stone detailing of the concentric planes on the north entrance surround

Interior Attributes:

- The spatial arrangement of a series of public spaces leading to an auditorium
- The plaster ceiling with details of the sun, stars, flowers, and astrological symbols in the original lobby
- The clear-span auditorium with vaulted ceiling and linear, ornamental plaster detailing arranged in a grid pattern
- The extant plasterwork and other architectural details that reflect the original décor scheme relating to theatrical history and traditional vaudeville theatre design, including the satyr masks, wall mural fragments, and ceiling grilles in the auditorium
- The inscription above the proscenium that reflects the original décor scheme, which reads "On with the dance let joy be unconfined"

Historical or Associative Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road as reflective of the former location of a live performance venue important to the performing arts community and as a representative work of Murray Brown's portfolio:

- The setback, placement and orientation of the building on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive and Manor Road East where it is part of a contiguous row of commercial buildings
- The property's increased massing toward the rear of the building, which accommodated the historic use as an auditorium for both cinematic and theatrical entertainment
- The presence and placement of a projecting sign aligning with the ridgeline of the gable roof reading the name of the theatre in combination with a marquee and canopy above the entrance

Interior Attributes:

- The astrological symbols in the plasterwork of the original lobby ceiling, which also featured in Brown's work for the Bedford Theatre.

Contextual Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 551 Mount Pleasant Road as part of a historic main street commercial streetscape:

- The setback, placement and orientation of the building on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road between Belsize Drive and Manor Road East where it is part of a contiguous row of commercial buildings
- The scale, form and massing of the two-storey building with the rectangular-shaped plan
- The property's material palette, consisting of brick with stone detailing
- The delineated bays along the property's front elevation, consistent with the rhythm produced by fine-grained building frontages along the surrounding historic commercial streetscape and recessed entrances of both storefronts and the central commercial unit (historically a theatre).
- The gabled roof and chimney of the central bay, which rise above the continuous streetwall giving prominence to the building, and the presence and placement of the

projecting sign in conjunction with a marquee and canopy above the entrance, which serve to identify the property as a local landmark

NOTE: the existing canopy, marquee, and projecting sign are not considered to be heritage attributes.