

378 Main Street East, Hamilton (Former Cathedral Boys’ School)

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST AND DESCRIPTION OF HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES

Description of the Designated Property

The heritage designation applies to the entire roughly L-shaped property at the southeast corner of Main Street East and Emerald Street South. The heritage designation recognizes both the school built in 1928 and the memorial wing built in 1951. The designation focuses on the front, east, and west facades of the 1928 building, the Emerald Street South facade of the 1951 wing and selected interior features.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The former Cathedral Boys’ High School stands as the first purpose-built school for privately funded Catholic high school education in Hamilton. The building of the school in 1928 represents a major accomplishment of the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton, which was established in 1856, and a milestone in the development of separate school education at the secondary level. The school demonstrates the ability of Hamilton’s Catholic population in the early twentieth century to fund the building of their own separate high school as beautiful and up-to-date as the publicly funded secondary schools.

For Cathedral Boys’ High School, the Diocese chose the same architectural firm who had designed Delta Collegiate Institute for the public school board four (4) years earlier. Cathedral Boys’ High School at 378 Main Street East takes its place in a trio of landmark schools built along Main Street East between 1918 and 1928 – Memorial Public School at 1175 Main Street East by Gordon Hutton in 1918, Delta Collegiate Institute at 1284 Main Street East by Gordon Hutton and William Souter in 1923-24, and Cathedral Boys’ High School at 378 Main Street East also by Hutton & Souter in 1928. They share similarities in the design of their front facades, but each is unique. All garnered attention in the architectural press.

The front, east, and west facades of the 1928 building epitomize the architectural style frequently labelled Tudor Gothic in the early twentieth century and now known as Modern Gothic, Collegiate Gothic or Neo-Gothic. Over a steel frame, rock-faced Credit Valley sandstone laid in broken courses is used for the body of the facades; and ashlar Indiana limestone provides the trim. The stone carving on the facades, but especially on the front facade, is of the highest order. The stone plaque bearing the name, Cathedral School, and Christian cross carved in stone and called a botonée or cathedral cross identify the school and relate to its origins in a room in St. Mary’s Parish School which first offered high school education for boys in 1912. St. Mary’s Parish held the cathedral of the Diocese at the time. The exceptional quality of the building’s stonework extends as far as to the facades’ uppermost windows whose pointed hood-moulds end in a variety of bosses.

The 1928 building was designed with three (3) entrances – a ceremonial entrance on the front facade and everyday entrances on the east and west facades. The pointed-arched entrances on the east and west are placed in projecting vestibules; and the pointed arch on the front serves as the portal to an entry porch, which is recessed from the front facade and almost wholly enclosed. In addition to the imposing portal, the architects have created a solemn space inside the entry porch by the use of a marble staircase, marble wainscoting, vaulted ceiling, pendant ceiling lamp, and oak-and-glazed double doors at the top of the staircase. Exquisite attention to detail is shown even at the level of the doors’ escutcheons whose motifs of pointed arches keep with the school’s Modern Gothic style.

The 1951 wing, also built to a high standard, memorializes students who had attended the school and died in the First or Second World War – a poignant tribute to young Canadians whose lives were cut short by war. The west facade of the wing complements the west facade from 1928 by maintaining the same height and perpetuating the rhythm of tripartite windows. The window bays framed in limestone contain window sash consisting of fixed glass block uppers and operable clear glass lowers. The entrance bay is identified in the 1951 facade through its distinctive columnar window filled with glass block, its stone cornice and cross, and its well-detailed entrance. Together, the 1928 west facade in Modern Gothic style and the Modern 1951 west facade make an impressive sweep along Emerald Street South. Commanding the street corner, the school is a landmark in the Stinson neighbourhood.

Inside, the 1951 wing retains its mid-twentieth century character essentially in the stairwell and staircase design, ground-floor lobby whose floor is laid artistically in terrazzo, north-south corridor that organizes internal circulation through the wing, and basement cafeteria-auditorium. The interior of the 1928 building combines features from the original construction, alterations at the time when the wing was added in 1951 and fire safety interventions of unknown date. The early twentieth century character of the 1928 building survives in the stairwell and staircase design, aspects of the east-west corridor, corridor doorways, and basement gymnasium.

Description of Heritage Attributes

Front, East and West Facades of 1928 Building

Heritage attributes are replete on the front (north), east and west facades and include:

- the setback from Main Street East, the terraced rise up from the street and the front entrance walk of flat stone landings and low stone walls;
- rock-faced Credit Valley sandstone walls laid in broken courses, Indiana limestone trim and all stone carvings;
- the symmetrical front facade consisting of an entrance bay in the middle, two (2) windowed bays to either side of the entrance bay and a pedimented blind bay at either end of the building;
- the front entrance pointed-arched portal with its embrasure, carved spandrels and wrought-iron gate;

- the buttresses to either side of the portal and their wall-mounted lamps and carved crests;
- the ceremonial entry porch, recessed from the front facade and almost wholly enclosed, and its marble staircase, marble wainscotting, vaulted ceiling decorated with a plaster relief in a pattern of grape vines and Tudor roses, and pendant ceiling lamp;
- the front entrance doorway composed of oak-and-glazed double doors with their door handles and escutcheons and a border of sidelights and transom light;
- the projecting vestibules on the building's east and west sides with their pointed-arched doorways;
- all window openings on the basement, ground and uppermost floors and original sash where it exists; and,
- the parapets and their battlements at both the main roof line and at the vestibules' roof line.

West Facade of 1951 Wing

Heritage attributes are found across all six bays of the wing's west facade and include:

- the buff brick wall;
- limestone trim expressed as the grid-like frame around windows, stringcourses, the cornice atop each end bay, and roof line coping;
- windows with their fixed glass block uppers and operable clear glass lowers; and,
- the entrance bay at the building's southwest corner, featuring double doors, transom light, embrasure beside the doors, wall-mounted lamps and columnar window filled with glass block.

1928 Building Interior

Heritage attributes that are accessible to visitors and remain from the 1928 construction include:

- the east and west stairwells and staircases (but not the replacement fire doors);
- the terrazzo floor laid in a checkerboard pattern on the ground-floor east-west corridor;
- the front vestibule with its checkerboard terrazzo floor and wood-framed opening into the east-west corridor;
- the wood-framed transom light across the north-south corridor where it meets the east-west corridor;
- five-panelled oak corridor doorways each with a glazed panel and transom light; and,

- the six-panelled double doors to the gymnasium, industrial window sash emitting natural light into the gymnasium, the proscenium arch for the stage and ceiling trusses over the gymnasium space.

1951 Wing Interior

Heritage attributes that are accessible to visitors and capture the mid-twentieth century character of the 1951 construction include:

- the stairwell and staircase in the wing's southwest corner and the entrance to each floor that has double doors in a wall made of glass blocks;
- the ground-floor lobby's terrazzo floor and baseboard, rounded corners, and operable steel sash window with bronze hardware and travertine marble sill;
- the terrazzo floor and baseboard for the ground-floor north-south corridor and the metal-and-glass frame across the corridor; and,
- the cafeteria-auditorium in the basement, featuring a terrazzo floor in a checkerboard pattern, black mastic baseboard, circular posts with black mastic base trim, fixed glass block and operable clear glass windows, an operable steel sash window, and a short staircase in the room's southeast corner leading outdoors to the schoolyard.