

Authority: Item 16, Committee of the Whole  
Report 01-023 (PD011116)  
CM: July 10, 2001

Bill No. 225

City of Hamilton

BY-LAW NO. 01-225

To Designate:

**LAND LOCATED AT MUNICIPAL NO. 14 MARY STREET**

As Property of:

**HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL VALUE AND INTEREST**

**WHEREAS** the Council of the City of Hamilton did give notice of its intention to designate the property mentioned in section 1 of this by-law in accordance with subsection 29(3) of the Ontario Heritage Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter O.18;

**AND WHEREAS** no notice of objection was served on the City Clerk as required by subsection 29(5) of the said Act;

**AND WHEREAS** it is desired to designate the property mentioned in section 1 of this by-law in accordance with clause 29(6)(a) of the said Act.

**NOW THEREFORE** the Council of the City of Hamilton enacts as follows:

1. The property located at Municipal No. 14 Mary Street, Hamilton, Ontario and more particularly described in Schedule "A" hereto annexed and forming part of this by-law, is hereby designated as property of historic and architectural value and interest.
2. The Corporate Counsel is hereby authorized and directed to cause a copy of this by-law, together with reasons for the designation set out in Schedule "B" hereto annexed and forming part of this by-law, to be registered against the property affected in the proper registry office.

3. The City Clerk is hereby authorized and directed,
- (i) to cause a copy of this by-law, together with reasons for the designation, to be served on The Ontario Heritage Foundation by personal service or by registered mail;
  - (ii) to publish a notice of this by-law once in a newspaper having general circulation in the City of Hamilton.

PASSED this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of October A.D. 2001



MAYOR



Acting CITY CLERK

Schedule "A"

To

By-law No. 01-225

Century Theatre  
14 Mary Street, Hamilton, Ontario

PIN 17168 0055 (R)

All of Lot 22 on Registrar's Compiled Plan No. 1393, City of Hamilton

TOGETHER WITH the use of the ten foot alley lying between Lots 19 and 20 on Plan 1393 and the twelve foot alley lying between Lots 21 and 22 as shown on said Plan. Both alleys being part of Lot 13 Concession 2 in the Township of Barton.

AND TOGETHER WITH the use of right-of-way 12 feet in width lying to the south of Lot 22 running from Mary Street easterly to Walnut Street being the northerly 12 feet of Lots 1 to 11 inclusive, Lots 13 to 18 inclusive and Lot 23 on said Registrar's Compiled Plan No. 1393.

As in Instrument Number VM248790.

## Schedule "B"

To

By-law No. 01-225

Century Theatre  
14 Mary Street, Hamilton, Ontario

## REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Context

The former Century Theatre at 14 Mary Street is located directly behind the landmark 1881 Copp Block which spans the entire block from Mary to Walnut Street. The theatre building originally stood in the midst of a thriving retail and entertainment district in the downtown core, just steps away from the busy King Street East commercial thoroughfare. Tucked away on a narrow street, its impressive four-storey façade with a crowning cornice arching over the semi-circular sign bearing its original "Lyric Theatre" name was only ever visible to visitors approaching the theatre from King Street at the intersection of Mary Street because of the continuous row of three-storey commercial buildings lining King. Today the building is much more visible from the north than it would have been in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as many commercial/ industrial buildings and houses along Mary Street and King William Street have since been demolished and the vacant land turned into parking lots. Even though the theatre building is vacant and in disrepair, its imposing five-storey brick and cast stone façade still maintains a commanding presence. The new owners of the former Century Theatre intend to convert it into residential units on the upper floors with commercial space on the ground floor, conserving and restoring as many of the original features on the Mary Street façade as possible.

History

Opened as a vaudeville theatre in 1913, the Lyric Theatre was hailed at the time to be the largest theatre in Hamilton with a seating capacity of over 2000. It was built for Dominion Theatres Limited to offer "top-class" Loews Vaudeville and moving pictures to the citizens of Hamilton. At a time when this form of entertainment was extremely popular, the Lyric Theatre was one of the seven largest and grandest theatres of its type to be built in Hamilton, three of which were located in the immediate vicinity: the Temple, the Capitol and the Palace. In 1914, the Lyric was sold to the Canadian United Theatre Company of London, Ontario, and became the Keith Vaudeville Circuit's permanent home in Hamilton. The theatre underwent extensive renovations in 1922, making it "one of the most palatial amusement centres in the Dominion". Purchased in 1940 by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Theatres it was fully modernized to serve as a state-of-the-art movie house. In 1967, the Century underwent yet another complete refurbishing and continued to operate until closing in 1989 when the new multi-theatre complex opened in Jackson Square. Today, the Century and the Tivoli on James Street North are the only two of Hamilton's grand early 20<sup>th</sup> century theatres to survive with their auditoriums.

## Architecture

The Lyric Theatre was originally built with a four storey wrap-around brick masonry façade designed in a Renaissance Revival style. It featured six pilasters with cast stone capitals supporting a cast stone moulding that was originally surmounted by an elaborate crowning cornice (almost certainly fabricated of galvanized iron) with a central round arched section framing a semi-circular metal sign panel. The symmetrical front façade was divided by four brick pilasters into three window bays. The wood-framed sash windows originally provided natural light for the offices located on the three floors at the front of the building.

In 1922, the building was extensively remodeled with an "elaborate new entrance, modern balcony and beautiful mezzanine floor". In 1940, the building underwent more major changes, which most likely included the fifth floor addition at the front. The architects, Kaplan and Sprachman of Toronto, reputedly designed many outstanding pictures houses across Canada. Claimed to be the first theatre in Canada to have the modern convenience of year-round air conditioning, it was decorated with sensational new fluorescent carpet never before seen in Canadian theatres. Fluorescent paint was applied to the ceiling and wall panels in modernistic designs and illuminated with black lighting. The entrance was again altered to include a new marquee, stainless steel box office, vitrolite cladding and neon lighting. Many of these elements were lost when the theatre was again renovated in 1967. The only decorative feature of the 1940 interior to survive was a series of identical abstract Art Deco panels painted on the side walls of the auditorium, which are now faded but still visible.

Today, the upper façade retains its original brick masonry facing and cast-stone trim, and its original window openings with some of the wood sash windows (now hidden behind metal cladding) and cast-stone lintels. Although the decorative cornice has been removed, the painted metal "Lyric Theatre" sign has survived, now badly faded but with the lettering still just discernible. The only surviving original feature of the street level façades is the cast stone lower cornice which wraps around the sides of the building, where it is still visible and partially intact. The front section may be intact, or partially, behind the aluminum fascia panel. Even in its neglected condition, the former Lyric/ Century Theatre continues to stand as a significant example of Hamilton's early 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre architecture.

## Designated Features

Important to the preservation of the former Lyric/ Century Theatre is the west (front) façade and the 20-foot sections of the north and south walls which echo the architectural treatment of the front façade. Included are the six brick pilasters; the cast stone capitals, sills, upper string course and surviving sections of the lower cornice; the semi-circular metal sign panel; the original window openings and any surviving wood sash windows. Also included are the 1940 painted panels in the auditorium.