



Figure 1 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, June 2019

# Research Report

Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office

47 Simcoe Street South

Oshawa, ON

Prepared for Heritage Oshawa

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November 2019

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Purpose of Report**

This report evaluates the cultural heritage significance of 47 Simcoe Street South in the City of Oshawa in accordance with Ontario Regulation 9/06, Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest, under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The purpose of this undertaking is to more fully determine the heritage value of the property in accordance with the Ontario Heritage Act (the Act).

### **1.2 Legislative Context**

Ontario Regulation 9/06 under the Ontario Heritage Act sets out the criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, which is required in order to designate a property under the provisions of Part IV of the Act.

A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the following criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:
  - i. is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method; or
  - ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit; or
  - iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.
2. The property has historical value or associative value because it,
  - i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community; or
  - ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture; or
  - iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.
3. The property has contextual value because it,
  - i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area; or
  - ii. is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings; or
  - iii. is a landmark.

After analyzing the history of and heritage attributed to the subject property, it is concluded that the subject property merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act in light of criteria 1(i), 2(i) and 3(iii).

## 2.0 Description of Property

### 2.1 Location

The building located at 47 Simcoe Street South is located on the southeast corner of Simcoe Street South and Athol Street East in the City of Oshawa.

### 2.2 Legal Description

The property at 47 Simcoe Street South is located on the south east corner of Simcoe Street South and Athol Street East on Lot 10 in Concession One within the City of Oshawa. The legal description of the property is Lot 6 SE Simcoe Street, Lot 6 SW Celina Street Plan, Part Lot 5 SE Simcoe Street, Part Lot 5 SW Celina Street Plan H50005 Oshawa; Parts 1 and 2 40R10427; Oshawa.

### 2.3 Site Description

Constructed in 1953, the property at 47 Simcoe Street South is located on the southeast corner of Simcoe Street South and Athol Street East, bounded by Celina Street to the east, and 57 Simcoe Street South to the south. Located within Downtown Oshawa, the former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office's frontage is 41.45 metres (136 ft.) on Simcoe Street South and 29.26 metres (96 ft.) on Athol Street East, filling the majority of the area of the site (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 – Location of 47 Simcoe Street South, Oshawa. The red dot indicates the location of the former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office. City of Oshawa GIS Map June 2019

## **3.0 Historical Context**

### **3.1 Summary**

In 1907, Oshawa's first official stand-alone post office was opened on the northeast corner of Ontario Street and King Street East, at 40 King Street East. Customs offices were located on the second floor of the building and the third floor was a flat for the caretaker. The central post office remained at 40 King Street East until a new building, the Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, was opened to the public at 47 Simcoe Street South in 1954.

Located in Oshawa's downtown business centre, the former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office stands as a landmark on the corner of Simcoe Street South and Athol Street East. The building is an excellent example of the Art Moderne style of architecture that was applied to various civic and institutional projects in Downtown Oshawa.

The former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office is closely associated with the 1934 Public Works Construction Act (P.W.C.A.) designed to stimulate the economy during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Oshawa was in need of a new post office and the construction of a new federal building in the community would have relieved the economic pressure felt by the community. Discussion of the construction of a new post office in Oshawa began in the late 1930s. The initial plans were not drawn up until 1947 and construction did not take place until 1953. This delay was caused by the Second World War, as all public works of that kind would be stopped as communities on the home front assisted with war efforts.

The grand opening of the new post office on November 26, 1954 was attended by the Hon. Dr. J.J. McCann, then Minister of National Revenue.

On October 5, 2007 the retail of postal products and services were discontinued, and the post office closed to the general public. .

Canada Post's Oshawa distribution facility at 47 Simcoe Street South in downtown Oshawa was relocated to a new facility that was built at 301 Ritson Road North in 2018, to modernize delivery methods to meet the growing needs of Durham Region.

### **3.2 Early Lot History**

In the mid-1880s, two businessmen, Mr. Hugo Rathbun and Captain R.C. Carter, saw an opportunity to build a railway that connected the Grand Trunk Railway (G.T.R.) with Oshawa's port. This railway would help transport building materials into the City, help local industries move more product to market, and provide for passenger transport. The Oshawa Railway and Navigation Company was chartered on June 23, 1887; the name would eventually change to the Oshawa Railway Company in 1891. On May 16, 1895, the Oshawa Railway Company purchased a portion of Lot 10, Concession 1 to build an office and several car barns (see Figure 3 below). The car barns remained at this location until 1939.



Figure 3 - Oshawa Railway car barns at the corner of Simcoe Street South and Athol Street East, where the former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office currently stands. circa 1915. Photo taken from the Thomas Bouckley Collection, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

According to the 1948 Fire Insurance Map there was no structure on the northern portion of the lot. The lot appeared to be a parking lot until it was purchased by the Federal Government in 1950 to erect a federal building, which would contain the post office, customs offices and other government departments.

The YMCA was once located on the lot that is now occupied by the south half of the former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office (see Figure 4). This YMCA building was torn down to make room for the new Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office.



Figure 3 - YMCA Building, Oshawa, circa 1912. Photo taken from the Thomas Bouckley Collection, the Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

## 4.0 Structural Design and Architecture

### 4.1 Form and Design

The Art Moderne style follows closely after the Art Deco style. Art Deco was a response to the new age of speed and electricity and was largely for the wealthy. Art Moderne was a response to Art Deco from designers to meet the needs of ordinary citizens living in the modern world of cars, airplanes and automats. Much of the strength of the Art Deco style was in the emphasis on exquisite craftsmanship and over-the-top detailing. Art Moderne designers looked towards a new age of excellent design for everyone. The artisan and his hand tools were set aside for the age of the machine with the idea that mass production and quality were not mutually exclusive. The new look can be summed up in one word — streamlined. A basic rectangular building can be made "Classical" by the addition of columns, a pediment, or an architrave. The same building can be made Art Moderne with the addition of curved bays, chrome siding, Vitrolite, glass block, or neon signage.

When federal, provincial and municipal governments started “make-work” projects in the 1930s to stimulate the economy, the buildings that they commissioned were intentionally frugal in character. They were conservatively Classical designs, with no waste of taxpayer money. Federal governments throughout North America built a number of sizeable, multi-purpose Federal buildings in larger cities, as well as many smaller post offices, customs and excise offices and various other buildings in towns and cities.

Art Moderne—style buildings have symmetrical main facades, flat or nearly flat roofs, and may feature a monumental order of pilasters across the front, with prominent plinths and entablatures, all executed in white stone or artificial cast stone. On occasion the Classical motifs of pilasters and entablatures are extremely simplified, creating a grid of horizontal and vertical lines on the surface of the building.

Art Moderne style is closely related to the Art Deco style, a rejection of historic precedents in its use of new construction technology, particularly suitable for the 20th century's newly emerging building forms, including the skyscraper. In Oshawa, Art Deco and Art Moderne—style buildings may be found in a variety of smaller-scale buildings, such as the Oshawa Public Utilities Commission building, theaters such as the Biltmore (now the Oshawa Music Hall), and the buildings at 700 and 900 Park Road South.

The former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office located at 47 Simcoe Street South is representative of the Art Moderne style. Constructed in the mid-1950s, this simple, rectangular two-storey structure features a projecting entry bay, featuring the official Royal Coat of Arms of Canada, carved to appear three-dimensional, on the exterior northwest corner of the structure. This entry bay has a full-height concave curve on the front (west) façade, which is mirrored by the convex curved overhang above the double front doors and the curving side walls leading in to these doors. Featured on the north side of the projecting entry bay is a large two-storey window, modern in design, which provides ample light into the main entryway. The building is of reinforced concrete construction, faced with cut stone on the three street-facing façades, and brick on the south and southeast façade.

Featured on each of the street-facing facades are large, regularly spaced ten-pane windows, framed in aluminum, with decorative hood moulds over the first-storey windows. Another decorative feature are the square geometric motifs in a horizontal band under the first-storey windows on the street-facing façades. This motif is echoed in the original double front doors in the entry bay, each of which includes three framed, stacked square windows of similar proportions to the squares underneath the first-storey windows.

The interior features terrazzo floors and staircase, a common feature found in federal buildings constructed in this era. An unusual feature of the building at the time of construction was an observation post / office built into the ceiling of the main floor and accessed by a staircase from the basement, as reported in the November 25, 1954 edition of the Oshawa Daily Times Gazette.

#### **4.2 Architects**

Like many other Federal buildings across the country, no individual is credited with this building's design. However, it reflects Public Works' high standards as a well-built, carefully laid out building with quality workmanship. In November 1950, the contract to prepare the plans for the Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office was given to the Toronto firm of Marani and Morris. Tenders for construction were called in October 1952. According to local newspapers, construction had started on the building in 1953.



## **5.0 Applicability of Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act**

In light of the findings of this report, it is concluded that the property located at 47 Simcoe Street South meets the criteria outlined in Regulation 9/06. The property meets the criteria for designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of 1. Design or physical value, 2. Historical/associative value and 3. Contextual value.

- 1 (i) This property has design and physical value because the building is representative of the Art Moderne style.
- 2 (i) This property has associative value as it is closely associated with the 1934 Public Works Construction Act (PWCA) which was designed to stimulate the economy during and following the Great Depression and to generate employment.
- 3 (iii) The former Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office maintains an unchanged relationship to its site and contributes to Downtown Oshawa as a familiar and prominent City landmark.

## 6.0 Resources

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- Oshawa Daily Times Gazette. "New Federal Building and Post Office Opened." December 31, 1954, page 23
- Oshawa This Week. "Postal Products and Services to Close." August 20, 1993, page 3.
- Oshawa This Week. "Canada Post closing downtown retail outlet." July 23, 2007.
- Oshawa This Week. "What's Going On Here: 301 Ritson Rd. N." September 7, 2018.
- Vernon's City of Oshawa Directory, 1921 -1995*
- [www.ontarioarchitecture.com](http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com)

## 7.0 Current Photographs of the Property



Figure 5 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, northwest façade. June 2019



Figure 6 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, north façade. June 2019



Figure 7 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, southeast façade. June 2019



Figure 8 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, south façade. June 2019



Figure 9 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, east façade. June 2019



Figure 10 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, main entranceway. June 2019



Figure 11 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, first floor window opening with hood mould above and geometric pattern below each window. June 2019

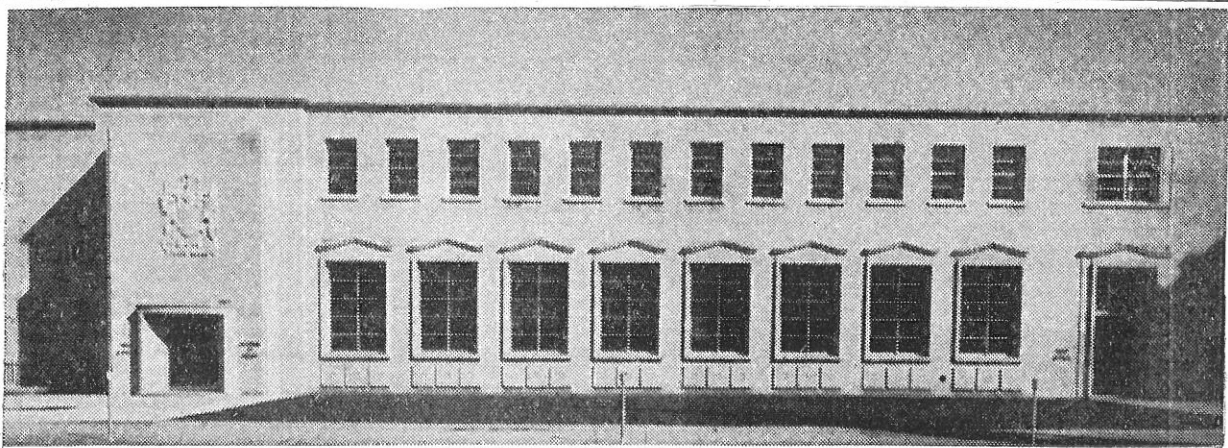


Figure 12 - Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office, main entrance, west façade, with a crest of the Royal Coat of Arms of Canada above the doorway. June 2019

## 8.0 Historic Photographs of the Property



Simcoe Street, looking North from Athol Street and site of new Post Office and Government Building.



### NEW FEDERAL BUILDING AND POST OFFICE

Overdue and on the drafting boards for many years, Oshawa's new federal building constructed by the dominion government of public works, be

came a reality in 1954. It was formally opened on November 26 by Hon. Dr. J. J. McCann, minister of national revenue. The new federal building houses the

Oshawa post office service in all its branches, the customs and national revenue offices, and space is also available for any

other departments of the federal government operating in Oshawa.

—Times-Gazette Staff Photo

Figure 13 - Image from the Times Gazette, November 1954 when the Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office opened.