



Figure 1 - 900 Park Road South

Research Report

General Motors of Canada

700 and 900 Park Road South

Oshawa, ON

Prepared for Heritage Oshawa

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

This report evaluates the cultural heritage significance of 700 and 900 Park Road 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(i),(ii) and (iii).

2.0 Description of Property

2.1 Location

The buildings located at 700 and 900 Park Road South are located in what was originally known as East Whitby, now part of the City of Oshawa. 700 Park Road South is located on the west side of Park Road South, south of Bloor Street West and across from the westerly terminus of Cordova Road. 900 Park Road South is located on the west side of Park Road South, south of Bloor Street West and just north of Wentworth Street West (Figure 2).

2.2 Legal Description

The properties at 700 and 900 Park Road South are located on Lot 13 in Concession Broken Front within East Whitby Township, now the City of Oshawa. 700 and 900 Park Road South are part of a larger parcel encompassing the majority of the General Motors South Plant, municipally known as 1100 Park Road South.

The legal description of the property at 1100 Park Road South is:

PT LT 13 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN EW23139 (SECONDLY) EXCEPT OS75744 & OS91241; PT LT 13 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN EW23341 EXCEPT OS91241; PT LT 13 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN * D329027, D318841, OS177565 & OS176568; PT LT 14 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN EW23140 EXCEPT OS75744, 40R15834 & PTS 3, 4, 10 & 11 40R9435; PT LT 14 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN EW23340; PT LT 14 CON BROKEN FRONT EAST WHITBY AS IN EW23338 EXCEPT PT 10 40R8780, PTS 1 & 2 40R8779, PT 1 40R9917 & PT 2 40R6485; OSHAWA. *OS128089 (ADDED 2000 04 04 BY T.CUTLER), T/W EASEMENT OVER PT LT 15 BFC (EAST WHITBY) OVER PT 4 PL 40R23465 AS IN DR384840 S/T EASEMENT IN GROSS OVER PT 1, PL 40R23562 AS IN DR629302; TOGETHER WITH AN EASEMENT OVER PART LOT 13 CONCESSION BROKEN FRONT BEING PART 1, 40R29541 AS IN DR1731522

2.3 Site Description

Construction of the 161.88 hectare (400 ac.) General Motors South Plant began in 1952. The first portion to be constructed was the parts distribution centre also known as the Central Parts Warehouse. The initial building covered 3.44 hectares (8.5 ac.) and a 2.02 hectares (5 ac.) addition was completed shortly after.

700 Park Road South was the administration centre of the Central Parts Warehouse. In 1954, a 19.83 hectare (49-ac.) assembly plant opened on the site.

In 1955, 900 Park Road South was constructed. The South Plant Main Office occupied this space, comprised of departments and personnel directly concerned with manufacturing operations.

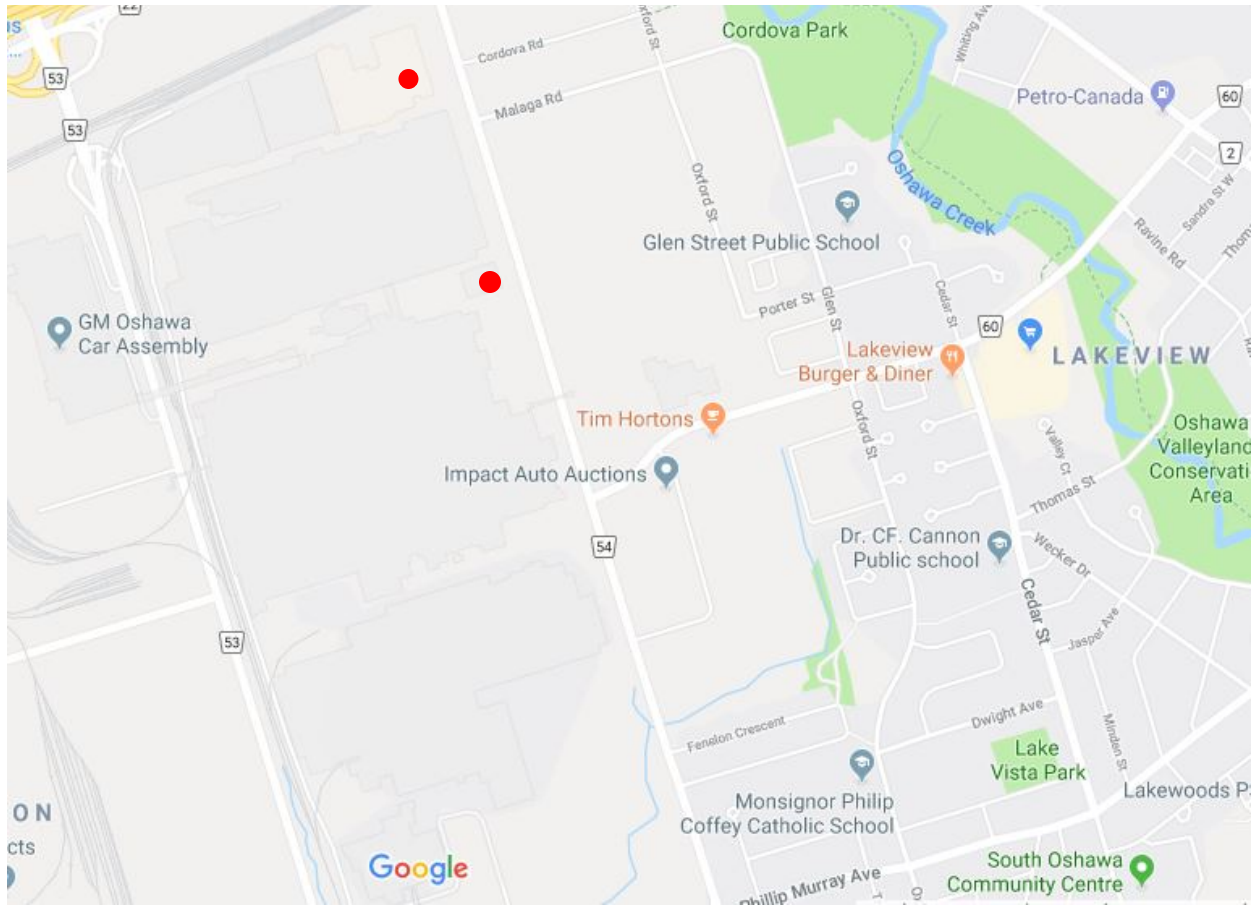


Figure 1 - Location of 700 and 900 Park Road South, Oshawa. 900 Park Road South is the top red dot and 700 Park Road South is the lower dot. Google Maps - May 2019

3.0 Historical Context

3.1 Summary

In 1907, Robert Samuel (R.S.) McLaughlin signed a contract to put Buick automobile engines into his famous McLaughlin carriages. In 1918, the McLaughlin Motor Car Company and Chevrolet Motor Car Company of Canada merged to become General Motors of Canada Limited (G.M.). Three years after the merger, the world's first brake lights appeared on cars produced at GM's Oshawa plant (North Plant). During World War II, GM worked on military vehicles, producing 500,000 fighting vehicles and Mosquito fuselages.

The 1950s marked an era of incredible expansion in Oshawa for GM Canada, beginning with a massive new parts and accessories warehouse, located at 700 Park Road South. In 1954, car final-assembly operations vacated what was known as the "Fabrication Plants" at the North Plant, and relocated to the new South Plant. In 1955, 900 Park Road South opened as the main office for the new South Plant, occupied by departments and personnel directly associated with the manufacturing operations.

The company continued to grow in Oshawa, and the massive complex in the south end of the City was the largest automobile assembly plant in the Commonwealth when it opened in 1953, and represented the largest car manufacturing facility in Canada.

By 1983, G.M. was the largest car manufacturer in Canada. Employing up to 23,000 workers in Oshawa alone, it generated \$10 billion in sales and accounted for 40 per cent of the Canadian automotive market.

GM's current Canadian headquarters, built in 1989 at 1908 Colonel Sam Drive, consolidated employees from 10 buildings across the city. The City of Oshawa was able to boast that it was "the City that Moto-vates Canada" in its municipal slogan. The General Motors South Plant received 29 J.D. Power awards, and had a track record of great quality and customer satisfaction.

However, beginning in the 1990s, waves of layoffs and closures shrank G.M.'s presence in Oshawa, prompting city officials to use tax freezes and other enticements to attract new employers. Despite high industry rankings for the quality of their products, the plants were hit hard whenever G.M. faced financial trouble. By 2005, there were only 6,000 plant workers — by 2018, that number had fallen to 3,000.

On November 26, 2018, G.M. announced the 2019 closure of the Oshawa car assembly plant complex, ending 111 years of auto manufacturing in Oshawa. On December 18, 2019, a white GMC Sierra pickup truck was the final vehicle to roll off the assembly line.

G.M. has announced it plans to retool some of the plant for parts manufacturing and to construct a test track for advanced technology vehicles, which together could preserve about 300 jobs.

The company's presence, and that of the McLaughlin family who developed its Canadian operations, is still visible across Oshawa, from the main downtown library branch and art gallery, which were named after members of the McLaughlin family, to the Oshawa Generals hockey team, which was originally sponsored by the automaker.

3.2 Early Lot History

The 161.88 hectares (400 ac.) that the General Motors South Plant currently sit on were originally two separate parcels of 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) each within Concession Broken Front, East Whitby.

The 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) of lot 13, Concession Broken Front, was patented on May 16, 1798 and granted to John Shaw. Samuel Dearborn purchased 80.94 hectares (200 ac.), a portion of which remained in the Dearborn family until the late 1940s.

General Motors of Canada purchased just under the original 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) on Lot 13, Concession Broken Front, in May 1950. The 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) of Lot 13, Concession Broken Front, Easy Whitby were annexed with the City of Oshawa on March 3, 1951.

The 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) of Lot 14, Concession Broken Front, East Whitby was patented on October 24, 1831 and granted to Abraham Smith. The Hinkson and Dearborn families owned portions of this lot from the 1890s until 1950, when this portion of land was purchased by General Motors of Canada Ltd. The 80.94 hectares (200 ac.) of Lot 14, Concession Broken Front, Easy Whitby were annexed with the City of Oshawa on April 3, 1950.

When General Motors of Canada Limited purchased the property, most of it was farmland, with a few family residences. 700 and 900 Park Road South are both located on Lot 13, Concession Broken Front.

4.0 Structural Design and Architecture

4.1 Form and Design

The Art Deco style is one of the easiest architectural styles to identify as its sharp-edged looks and stylized geometrical decorative details are so distinctive. The development of this architectural style was an intentional break with past precedents in an effort to embody the ideas of the modern age. It was the first American architectural style to look forward rather than back, as preceding revival styles had done. Both the Art Deco style and the Art Moderne style are sometimes referred to as "Modernistic" for this reason, although the two styles are of distinctly different appearance.

The Art Deco style, with its smoothly finished wall surfaces and distinctive ornamentation of chevrons, zigzags, and other geometrical motifs, led to the development of a new, more streamlined, less ornamented style of architecture, namely the Moderne style of the 1930s. Influenced by advancements in the industrial design of ships, planes, railroad engines and automobiles, the Moderne style featured smooth walls with little surface ornamentation, rounded corners and curved glass. Moderne buildings have flat roofs, and bands of windows with a horizontal emphasis. Some buildings of this style have simple pipe balustrades, panels of glass block windows, curved canopies, or aluminum or stainless-steel detailing.

Art Deco and Art Moderne style were a rejection of historic precedents in their use of new construction technology and were particularly suitable for the design of newly emerging building forms of the 20th century, such as the skyscraper. In Oshawa, Art Deco/Moderne style is found in a variety of downtown buildings, such as the Oshawa Federal Building and Post Office on Simcoe St. South, and smaller scale properties such as the Biltmore theatre (now the Oshawa Music Hall), and the Oshawa Public Utilities Commission building.

700 and 900 Park Road South are representative of the Art Moderne style. Both buildings are sleek in design with a linear appearance. Their main façades feature glass and stainless-steel detailing around windows and doors. Large horizontal bands of windows are featured on the façades of the rectangular buildings.

700 Park Road South is a rectangular one-storey brick building. The main entranceway is representative of the Art Moderne style, sleek in design, with glass and stainless-steel detailing around the windows and door (see Figures 7 and 8). Large horizontal bands of multi-paned windows are featured on all four façades. The central section of this building also includes sets of coloured-glass panels in vertical bands above and below the windows in an alternating lighter and darker tone of green (see Figures 4, 9 and 10), such panels being a distinctive decorative feature in mid-century modern commercial design. The green is repeated in the South Main Office lobby trim (see "Interiors," below).

900 Park Road South is a rectangular two-storey building. The main entranceway is representative of the Art Moderne style, as it projects slightly, with a cement door surround giving the appearance of columns. The cement surround detail is also found around the linear band of multi-pane windows on the first storey and second storey. The entranceway features numerous large windows separated by stainless steel details.

Art Moderne buildings typically have flat roofs and exterior wall surfaces that are usually smooth with very little ornamentation. 700 and 900 Park Road South both feature flat roofs. Their exterior wall surfaces are yellow brick with cement details, relatively smooth surfaces, and have little ornamentation on the exterior, except for the following:

- The entranceways;
- A decorative projecting brick course that forms a subtle line and shadow several courses below the roofline on 700 Park Road South and acts as a belt course between the first and second storeys of 900 Park Road South; and,
- Cement hood mouldings with copper flashing – now with a green patina to match the coloured glass and other interior elements – on both buildings (see Figures 7, 9, & 10).

The South Main Office at 900 Park Road South also has attractive landscaping with mature trees, and a decorative wrought-iron railing surrounding the east façade that includes a stylized shield motif, perhaps representing the heraldic shield of the Buick emblem (see Figure 17).

4.2 Construction Materials

The initial building at 700 Park Road South covered 3.44 hectares (8.5 ac.) and a 2.02–hectare (5 ac.) addition was completed shortly after. Materials required to build this complex included 1.01 hectares (2.5 ac.) of glass, 13 607.771 kilograms (30 000 lbs) of putty, 2 110 000 bricks, 11 793 402 kilograms (13 000 tons) of steel, 15 000 000 nails, 143.85 (38 000 gallons) of paint, 12 275 lighting tubes, 17.7 kilometers (7.5 mi) of conduit tubing, 252.67 kilometers (157 mi) of copper tubing, and 17.7 kilometers (11 mi) of disposal pipe. The buildings have double-barrelled fire protection, and are of fireproof construction and equipped with built-in sprinkler systems.

4.3 Architects/Construction Firms

Further research is required to determine the architects behind 700 and 900 Park Road South. The original South Plant Warehouse complex at 700 Park Road South was built by Pigott Construction, a company responsible for some of Canada's finest buildings. J.J. McGuire General Contractors has completed many renovations and additions at the General Motors South Plant in Oshawa since their inception in 1987. There have been numerous construction firms, architects and consultants involved with the building of this large autoplex over the years.

4.4 Interiors

Though the office interiors at 700 and 900 Park Road South have likely been altered since their construction, notable features still exist. In 700 Park Road South, the Parts Warehouse and Office, the original interior layout followed a common design of the time, with a large, uninterrupted central open-plan area with fluorescent lighting and rows of employees' and secretaries' steel desks marching into the distance, ringed by executives' and managers' offices (see Figure 11). An example of one of these offices, with a full-height door and matching floor-to-ceiling windows facing the interior, remains (see Figure 12).

Continuing the exteriors' mid-century modern "less is more" design aesthetic, which foregrounded beautiful materials and finishes over decorative embellishment, the design of the lobby of the South Main Office at 900 Park Road South uses few materials, but in a simple and impactful way, creating a subtly luxurious effect.

The lobby at 900 Park Road South is accessed by a short double set of stairs on either side of the inner entrance doors. The stairs include a stainless steel railing with a modern geometric design of interlocking squares (Figure 18). The steps, floor, and half-wall just inside the entrance appear to be stone, and the lobby floor of large stone tiles features an outer band in dark green material, possibly marble, that divides the room. The same dark green material is used on the wall at the stairs in a wider band that separates the stone and panelling (Figure 19).

The main finish in the lobby area is a pattern of large rectangular sheets of light-coloured wood panelling, likely birch, with narrow trim, which covers the walls and side doors. The lower section of the walls is set off with a chair rail, and the walls are finished with a coved crown moulding. An original clock is mounted above the exit door on the back wall (Figure 20), and on the front (east) wall. To the right of the entry doors, a large steel sculpture takes the place of one of the birch panels. It features the GM initials within a maple leaf outline (Figure 22).

In the adjacent stairwell to the second floor offices, the east-facing window includes birch-panel surrounds (Figure 24) and the floor transitions to a green terrazzo surrounded by a finer-grained, darker green coved band as a modern version of baseboards (Figure 25). Upstairs, the floors are 9 x 9 vinyl tile in a checkered, striae pattern of two shades of grey, laid with four tiles per square, each set a quarter-turn (90°) from the previous tile (Figure 26).

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 properties located at 700 and 900 Park Road South meet the criteria outlined in Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The properties meet the criteria for designation prescribed by the Ontario Heritage Act under the three categories of 1. design or physical value, 2. historical/associative value and 3. contextual value as follows:

- 1 (i) These properties have design and physical value because the buildings are representative of the Art Moderne style, particularly the entrances of both 700 and 900 Park Road South.
- 2 (i) These properties have associative value as they are directly related to the McLaughlin family, who were instrumental in the development of General Motors' Canadian operations. The McLaughlin name is still visible everywhere in the Oshawa community, from the main downtown library branch and art gallery, which were named after members of the McLaughlin family, to the Generals hockey team, which was originally sponsored by the automaker.
- 3 (i) Contextually, the properties at 700 and 900 Park Road South are valued for their role in defining and supporting the character of the neighbourhood in South Oshawa as it evolved in the mid-20th century from farmland to an award-winning 400-acre autoplex developed by General Motors of Canada.
- 3 (ii) The properties at 700 and 900 Park Road South are both historically, visually and physically linked to their surroundings and remain key components of the industrial enclave that currently stands on the lands, representing an era when General Motors Oshawa was the largest manufacturer in Canada, and the South Plant was largest automobile assembly plant in the Commonwealth.
- 3 (iii) The properties at 700 and 900 Park Road South are landmarks, representing 111 years of auto manufacturing in Oshawa.

6.0 Resources

Blumenson, John. *Ontario Architecture: A Guide to Styles and Building Terms 1784 to the Present*. Toronto 1990

Beers, J.H. & Co. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of County of Ontario*. Toronto: 1877.

Conveyances Abstract. Durham Land Registry Office, Whitby ON.

Genealogy Files, Oshawa Archives

General Motors Fonds. Oshawa Archives

General Motors: Oshawa Fabrication Plants. Brochure 1977.

Heritage Oshawa. Interior Photographs

Oshawa Times. Salute to General Motors of Canada Ltd. Souvenir Edition

Vernon's City of Oshawa Directory, 1921–1995

www.ontarioarchitecture.com

7.0 Current Photographs of the Property



Figure 2 - 700 Park Road South, east façade



Figure 3 - East façade of 700 Park Road South, showing part of the central addition to the north.



Figure 4 - From Cordova Avenue, east façade of 700 Park Road South



Figure 5 - 700 Park Road South, northeast façade



Figure 6 - 700 Park Road South main entrance, east façade. Note carved cement cornice with copper flashing and four piers framing the entry.



Figure 8 - 700 Park Road South, close-up view of of main entrance with stainless doors and transom (left); and (right) window to left of door with stainless framing and lower panel.



Figure 9 - 700 Park Road South, close-up view of windows and coloured glass panels at employee entrance, north façade



Figure 10 – (left) 700 Park Road South employee entrance, central section, east façade; (right) Detail of string course, cornice, and copper flashing.



Figure 11 – Example of 1950s interior office layout, similar to 700 Park Rd South. Source: Pinterest.



Figure 12 - 700 Park Road South, view of manager's office and open area beyond.



Figure 13 - 900 Park Road South, South Main Office, east façade



Figure 14 - 900 Park Road South, South Main Office, southeast façade



Figure 15 - 900 Park Road South, northeast façade.



Figure 16 – South Main Office front entry, 900 Park Road South. Note the similar projecting frontispiece supported by four piers.



Figure 7 - 900 Park Road South, showing iron railing around east façade with stylized shield motif (left), perhaps reflecting the Buick emblem (right).



Figure 18 - 900 Park Road South, lobby interior, showing the stainless steel railing and double stairs.



Figure 19 - 900 Park Road South lobby interior, showing the stainless steel railing, double stairs, and green trim and insets.



Figure 20 - 900 Park Road South lobby interior, showing birch panelling and original clock (west wall).



Figure 21 - 900 Park Road South lobby interior, showing birch panelling and trim, stainless door jambs, chair rail, stone floors and green stone trim & baseboards (south wall and stairwell beyond).



Figure 22 - 900 Park Road South, lobby interior, showing entry and stainless steel GM sculpture (east wall).



Figure 23 - 900 Park Road South, lobby interior looking east, stainless door frames and transom (on west wall).



Figure 24 - 900 Park Road South south stairwell window, showing stainless window frames and birch panelling surrounds (front/east wall).



Figure 25 – 900 Park Road South, terrazzo flooring and cove “baseboard” trim in south stairwell.



Figure 26 – 900 Park Road South second floor, showing striae vinyl tiles in checkered pattern.

8.0 Historical Photographs of the Property



Figure 27 - Picture from the Oshawa Times showing construction of the GM South Plant in 1952



Figure 28 - Postcard showing the GM South Plant, Oshawa. Facing southeast. Date unknown.



Figure 29 - This photo shows the construction of the expansion of the General Motors of Canada South Plant, Chassis Plant. Facing northwest. Circa 1952. Photo Courtesy: John Wilson, Vintage Oshawa



Figure 30 - Aerial view of the General Motors South Plant complex looking southwest. Circa late 1960s. Photo 2374c, courtesy Thomas Bouckley Collection, Robert McLaughlin Gallery.