



Research Report

Biltmore Theatre
39 King Street East
City Of Oshawa

Prepared by:
M. Cole, Local Heritage Consultant

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

This report evaluates the cultural heritage significance of 39 King Street East in the City of Oshawa in accordance with Ontario Regulation 9/06, Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value, or Interest.

The purpose of this undertaking is to determine the heritage and landscape value of the property more fully 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 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,
 - 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,
 - 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,
 - 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 considering criteria 1 (i), 2 (i) and 3 (iii).

2. Location

The building located at 39 King Street East is located within the downtown core of the City of Oshawa.

2.1 Legal Description

PT LT C6 SHEET 19 PL 335 OSHAWA; PT LT C7 SHEET 19 PL 335 OSHAWA AS IN D282637; T/W D282637; OSHAWA

2.2 Site Description

Located in Oshawa's downtown core, the building located at 39 Street King stands prominently on the south side of King Street East, west of Celina Street and east of Albert Street.



Figure 1- Location of 39 King Street East, Oshawa, ON. GIS Map City of Oshawa, July 2021

3. Historical Context

3.1 Summary

The building at 39 King Street East, originally known as the Biltmore Theatre, was constructed in 1940. Operated by the Okun Brothers of Toronto, this theatre was one of five Ontario Biltmore theatres in the chain. Located in downtown Oshawa, the Biltmore Theatre was one of four movie theatres that was located along King Street East. The other theatres included the Marks, Regent and Plaza (Hyland) all venues providing entertainment.

3.2 Site History

The location of 39 King Street East is in the downtown core of the City of Oshawa. On June 22, 1931, Plan 355 was registered in the Town of Oshawa. On December 5, 1939, the land where 39 King Street East is located was sold by Thomas Kaiser to Meyer H. Okun. This property was considered for the location of the Oshawa Masonic Temple that currently stands on the corner of Centre and Metcalf.

On March 21, 1940, the property is listed as Biltmore Theatres (Oshawa) Limited, operated by the Okun Brothers of Toronto, the original purchasers of the property. The Biltmore Theatre opened to the public on April 4, 1940. Local advertisements indicate, after opening, Biltmore Theatre gave away dinnerware on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. It was advertised as "Genuine Imported English 22 Karat Gold "Regis" Dinnerware".

On April 25, 1947, Biltmore Theatres (Oshawa) Limited, Meyer Okun, Bernard (Ben) Okun, B.S. (Mac) Okun, Jack M. Shain and Barnett E. Laser are the listed individuals who sold the property to Odeon Theatres of Canada Limited. Although the theatre maintained the name of Biltmore Theatre until 1969. In the 1970s, operating as the Odeon, the theatre was forced to cater to more B rated movie listings, seldom saw new releases. It operated as an Odeon until 1988. In the 1990s the interior was remodeled for post film use as a music venue. It was a nightclub known as the Siren in the 1990s and the Oshawa Music Hall in the 2000s. Other businesses that ran out of this location included The Big Sexy, Status Lounge, and Marquee Nightclub.

3.3 Biltmore Theatre Chain

Oshawa's Biltmore Theatre was a chain of theatres owned by the Okun Brothers who resided in Toronto, ON Canada. The affluent Okun Brothers had made their fortune manufacturing and selling men's and women's hats under the Biltmore brand.

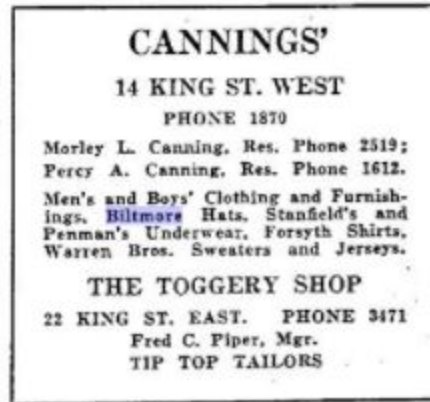


Figure 2 - Oshawa Courier, Cannings Ad, 1940. Oshawa Archives

Oshawa's Biltmore Theatre was the first theatre of five to be constructed by the Okun Brothers, prior to Canada entering World War II. In 1941, the second Biltmore Theatre operated by the Okun Brothers opened in Kingston. According to the 1940 City of Oshawa Directory, the Biltmore Theatre was offering double features at popular prices.

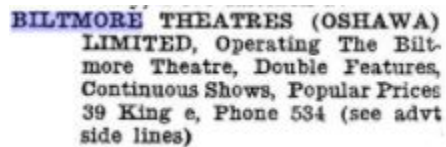


Figure 3 - Biltmore Theatre listing, Vernon's City of Oshawa Directory, 1940.

During World War II construction projects were ceased until after the conclusion of the war. In 1945, as wartime restrictions were lifted, this period saw an increase in building activity. More money was available for construction, more prospective consumers were available to cater towards and more time was available for entertainment. The Okun Brothers opened three more Biltmore Theatres.

Opening in 1948 was Toronto's Biltmore Theatre, located 319 Yonge Street, with 916 seats. Toronto's Biltmore Theatre was a street fixture from 1948 to 1982, showing double and triple features.

Sault Ste Marie's Biltmore Theatre opened in 1948 and Kitchener's Biltmore Theatre opening in December 1949.

The Biltmore Chain was considered an independent theatre opposed to the larger chains such as Famous Players. Therefore, the Biltmore Theatre chain seldom showed new releases. The entire group of Biltmore Theatres saw a decline in attendance in the 1960s and several theatres, were sold to Odeon Theatres of Canada Limited.

In the 1990s 39 King Street East was known as the Siren Night Club and in the 2000s it was the Oshawa Music Hall.

3.3 Current Owner

The current owner, Julius Kedvessy is in the process of restoring the interior and exterior of 39 King Street East and has maintained the original name, Biltmore Theatre. Care and consideration have been taken to ensure restorations reflect the feel and design of the original Biltmore Theatre.

The following is from a report submitted to Heritage Oshawa in April 2021, by Julius Kedvessy, owner of 39 King Street East, The Biltmore Theatre.

“We are requesting that Heritage Oshawa support the plan to aesthetically recreate the Biltmore sign with updated technology lighting and electronics, as well as the parapet clock and replace the existing original but broken thermometer with a similar aesthetically recreated and modernized thermometer.

The owner intends to strip the layers of paint and stucco on the exterior facade back to the original natural and man-made stone finish and trusts that will meet Heritage Oshawa approval and support.

Interior renovations are in process or complete to enhance the sound characteristics of the building to create a venue for production of live and live streaming music and entertainment events as appropriate to restrictions in place regarding COVID 19 protocols.”

4. Structural Design and Architecture

4.1 Form and Design

This former cinema is an example of Art Deco style. The Art Deco look of Ontario cinemas comes from Oscar Deutch - as in 'Oscar Deutch Entertains our nation'. He started building cinemas in the Art Deco style in Birmingham England in 1928. That style was adopted by most cinema owners very quickly all over the world including in Ontario, Canada.

Designed by Toronto Architects Wilbur Ralph Webb, Alex Blythe, and Wallace C. Sproule, the Biltmore Theatre was a model of modernity and sophistication when it opened in 1940. This classic Art Deco theatre was solidly built, with a steel frame, the exterior clad in brick that has been painted, the main street facing upper façade featured a smooth cut stone finish and brick on the other facades. Within the upper façade are recessed narrow windows featuring black metal linear horizontal decorations. A thermometer, located on the exterior of the building, is original and still in place. Originally there was a clock parapet that was located above the thermometer at the roofline.

The exterior treatment of the lower portion of the front facade has been altered several times, but some original features remain buried under the current treatment¹. Recently, the lower portion of the front facade was painted. The upper portion of the front facade has many of its original details. The original façade still exists, although it is currently covered in stucco and is being restored by the current owner.



Figure 4 – Biltmore Theatre, Exterior Thermometer, Photo Robert T. Bell, April 2021.

Located in the lower portion of the front façade is the entranceway. The original entranceway contained four steel frame doors with an oval shaped glass window in the centre of each door. A ticket booth was in the centre of the entranceway and beside the ticket booth were four display windows used to advertise attractions (possibly still in existence under current cladding). Located beside the entranceway were glass blocks

¹ Noted in correspondence to Heritage Oshawa from Julius Kedvessy.

that surrounded the original ticket booth on either side. The use of glass blocks was a common feature in Art Deco buildings.

The entranceway is still the same location, the current doors are not original but are reflective of the original design.

Marquess were given prominence in the Art Deco style. Used on cinemas, hotels and retail chains, the marquee was studded with lights and contained either ornate Art Nouveau carvings or streamlined colourful glitz. The first Biltmore sign was vertical in design and was suspended from a bracket mechanism on the roof. The original iconic Biltmore Sign contained neon lights surrounded by glass blocks on either side. It was replaced with an Odeon marquee in the late 1970s. The Odeon marquee was removed in the 1990s.

The current owner has plans to recreate the Biltmore sign and the clock parapet.

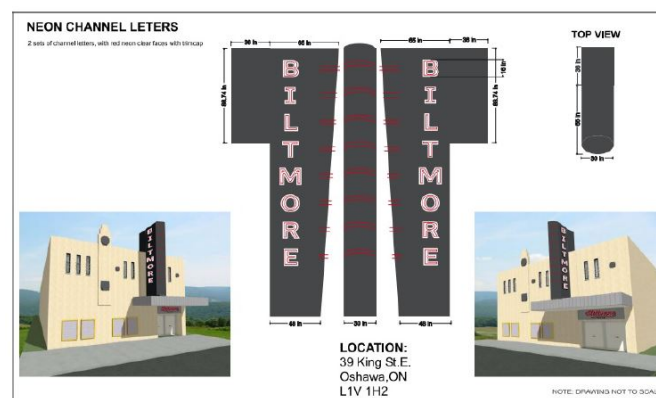


Figure 5 - Architect's Design Rendering of Neon Biltmore Sign and Clock Parapet, Courtesy Julius Kedvessy.

Like many Biltmore theatres, the interior was remodeled for post film use as a music venue. While the seating has all been removed, the stage area remains, as well as the mezzanine with wings (possibly extended since original). According to the current owner, there is little of original historical significance left in the interior.

5. 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 39 King Street East, in the City of Oshawa 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 Deco style.
2. (ii) This property has direct association with the affluent Okun Brothers, who owned the Biltmore Chain Theatres in Ontario. Oshawa's Biltmore Theatre was the first of five theatres constructed in Ontario.
3. (iii) The property is a landmark, located in downtown Oshawa, the Biltmore Theatre was one of four movie theatres that was located along King Street East. The other theatres included the Marks, Regent and Plaza (Hyland) all venues providing entertainment. The building at 39 King Street East, served as a theatre for over 50 years.

6. 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.

Census Records, Town of Oshawa, 1911, 1920, www.collectionscanada.ca

Conveyances Abstract. Durham Land Registry Office, Whitby ON.

Genealogy Files, Oshawa Archives

Kedvessy, Julius. Telephone Interview. June 2021

Kedvessy, Julius. Correspondence regarding history of Biltmore Theatre, 39 King Street East, Oshawa. Submitted to Heritage Oshawa.

City of Oshawa, Fire Insurance Maps, 1921, 1948

Oshawa Public Libraries, *Local History Collection*

Thomas Bouckley Collection. The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

Vernon's City of Oshawa Directory, 1935 -1995

1837 Walton's Directory Whitby Township

<http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/328>

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<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/7621>

<https://localfilmculturestoronto.wordpress.com/exhibition-sites-case-studies/the-biltmore-theatre>

<https://www.therecord.com/life/2019/09/06/celebrating-a-night-at-the-movies.html?rf>

Note: This report was completed without access to the Town of Oshawa's Assessment Rolls due to closure of the Archives of Ontario.

7. Historical Images of the Property



Figure 6 – Biltmore Theatre, circa 1940s. Archives of Ontario



Figure 7 – Biltmore Theatre Sign can be seen on the south side of King Street. Possibly this photo is from when the railway tracks were being ripped up in 1963. Also seen in this image is the Marks Theatre (south side) and Regent Theatre (north side). Archives of Ontario

Biltmore SPECIAL BARGAIN PREVIEW SHOW
All Seats 15¢ *Loges 30¢*
 SUNDAY MIDNITE 12:05 MONDAY - TUESDAY

WESTERN UNION
 The West caught at last in the magic glow of **TECHNICOLOR!**
 ROBERT YOUNG - RANDOLPH SCOTT - DEAN JAGGER - VIRGINIA GILMORE and Also "Model's View" Cartoons

TO-DAY and SATURDAY
 MICKY ROONEY as "YOUNG TOM EDISON"
 CESAR ROMERO (The Cisco Kid) "ROMANCE OF THE RIO GRAND" plus Cartoons

Starts 8:30
 1st Floor Shows

There's That Woman Again
 MICKY ROONEY VIRGINIA BRUCE
 LINDSEY BODGES
 ADDED FEATURE
 "Captain Castles"

SMOKING LOGS
 BUY KISS FREE CANDY SATURDAY AFTERNOON

IN TECHNICOLOR
MARK CRIST'S WESTERN UNION
 ROBERT YOUNG RANDOLPH SCOTT DEAN JAGGER VIRGINIA GILMORE
 Plus "Model's View" Cartoons
 "Clerk's Labor" "FIRE" "MAN"

BILTMORE

Figure 8 - Biltmore Ad, Oshawa Courier, October 10, 1941. Oshawa Archives Newspaper Collection



Figure 9 - Biltmore Theatre, Northeast Facade, Corner of King Street East, and Albert Street. circa 1950



Figure 10 - 39 King Street East, Biltmore Theatre south side. Oshawa Times 1963.



Figure 11 – Odeon Theatre, 39 King Street East, 1985. Oshawa Public Libraries, Local History Collection

8. Current Photographs of the Property



Figure 12 - 39 King Street East, Test Spot on Stucco by owner. April 2021, Photo Courtesy Robert T. Bell



Figure 13 - 39 King Street East, Interior, April 2021. Photo Robert T. Bell



Figure 14- 39 King Street East, Interior, April 2021. Photo Robert T. Bell



Figure 15 - 39 King Street East, East Façade. June 2021



Figure 16 - 39 King Street East. June 2021