

**The Oshawa Public Utilities Commission
100 Simcoe Street South
Oshawa**

SITE DESCRIPTION

Construction Date:	Completed 1931
Architectural Style:	Modernistic
Architect:	C.C. Stenhouse
General Contract:	W.J. Trick Company
Electrical:	Bowra Electric Co.
Heating:	F. Garrard
Plumbing:	W.R. Brown
Original Use:	Oshawa Public Utilities Commission Building
Present Use:	Oshawa Public Utilities Commission Building

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Plan:	"L" shaped (a reverse L)
Foundation:	Concrete
Exterior Wall:	Brick, ornamented with artificial stone
Roof Type:	Flat
Windows:	Rectangular

UNIQUE FEATURES:

Exterior Corners:	All 5 corners resemble rectangular pillars that are slightly higher than the roof
Windows:	Uniformly repeated modular composition
Doors:	Front and side doors are inset in an effort to achieve an embrasure-type style

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1887 some enterprising citizens in the Town of Oshawa joined in organizing the Oshawa Electric Light Company to provide both light and power to those in the community who were using this new form of energy.

In 1916, the Ontario Government purchased the Oshawa Electric Company, along with many other systems throughout the Province. These were then placed under the control of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario.

During the years following World War I, as Oshawa expanded to become a thriving industrial city, the demand for more light and power greatly increased. Also during this time period, the Hydro-Electric Power Commission inaugurated a plan whereby municipalities would be able to take over their local distribution systems and operate them as a publicly-owned utility.

In 1927, City Council began discussions on the advisability of purchasing the electric distribution system from the Ontario Government. In view of the importance of this proposal, and the ramifications involved, the council set up a special committee to study it. This committee was composed of men experienced in municipal government - D.A.J. Swanson, John Stacey, Gordon Conant, William Boddy and Sam Jackson. Out of their deliberations, there came a recommendation that the City should buy the electric distribution system as well as the gas system. After two years of negotiations, the purchase was finalized. The final proposition agreed to by the Council was that the City pay \$310,000 for the electric distribution system and \$210,000 for the gas plant and distribution system.

The next step taken by the City Council was to pass a by-law to establish a Public Utilities Commission. This by-law entrusted the control and management of the Electrical Distribution System, the Gas Plant and Distribution System, and the Waterworks System to the Commission.

The first election for the Commission was held on January 6, 1930. The elected members were: F.L. Mason (Chairperson), John Stacey, Gordon Conant, W.H. Ross and Mayor T.B. Mitchell.

The newly-formed Commission commenced operations in the Hydro's old location at 26 King Street West. These rented quarters were somewhat inadequate, and one of the first objectives of the Commission was to provide more suitable office headquarters. The result was the building erected at the north-west corner of Metcalfe and Simcoe Streets (100 Simcoe Street South), on

property secured from the city. Previous to the construction of the building, this property was vacant and owned by the City of Oshawa.

The Public Utilities staff moved into the new building on November 28, 1931. The formal opening was held on December 2, of that same year. The opening ceremonies took place in the new building at 7:30 p.m. with the Hon. J.R. Cook, Chairman of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, officiating. The ceremonies in the building itself were brief, with Hon. Cook declaring the building formally opened and unveiling a tablet that commemorated the event. The building was then open for inspection by the general public during the evening. A public meeting was then held in the auditorium of Centre Street Public School at 8:30 p.m.

The story of the Public Utilities Commission from 1930 to the present day has been one of steady expansion, growth and challenges. The foresight of the Commission has become evident in respect to both the strategic location of the building, and the provision for expansion (i.e. the second floor) that was included in the plans. From this office building, opened in 1931, the Oshawa Public Utilities Commission has through the years provided electricity, water, and transit services to the citizens of Oshawa. In the year 2000, the Oshawa Public Utilities was replaced by a new for profit business corporation, the result of the Energy Competition Act of 1998.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Oshawa Public Utilities Commission building is located at 100 Simcoe Street South, Plan H-5004, Block G, and Lots 2-4 & 7-10. Originally the erection of a new building was met by objection by some ratepayers. A meeting was held in November 1930 that pointed out that the work would not increase the civic debt one cent. No debentures were issued to pay for the cost and therefore the city's debenture debt would not be increased. Instead, the total cost for the new building, which was estimated to be \$60,000 was paid for out of the Commission's current funds.

The reason a new building was being constructed, was to consolidate the *offices* of the Commission under one roof. Originally they were scattered throughout parts of the city with the Commission paying various rents. The erection of a new building was considered a real investment and meant a considerable savings in efficient operation of the various public utilities in the city.

C.C. Stenhouse of Oshawa was retained as the architect and was entirely responsible for the drawing up of the plans and specifications for the building. The general contractor was W.J. Trick along with the Bowra Electric Co., F. Garrard, who carried out the heating contract, and W.R. Brown, who carried out the plumbing contract.

The building is two stories high and is approximately 50 by 70 feet in size, resembling an 'L'-shape. The treatment of the exterior design is said to be an example of the "modernistic trend" in architecture, which is clearly indicated in the heavy corner pylons and front details. The basement walls are constructed of concrete with heavy footings. The exterior walls are of brick backed up with insulating wall backing tile, and ornamented with an artificial stone selected for its strength and durability as well as its pleasing appearance. Heavy steel columns support the steel floor beams that are built into the outer walls at each end. The floors are of concrete, carried on steel joists and finished on top with mastic tiles. All plastering is done on metal lath and all windows are of metal.

In terms of any "extras" considered over and above the original specifications, were very minor. The only one considered to be of any importance by the Commission Committee at that time, was the installation of the electric clock over the front door, which necessitated the cutting of a hole in the wall after the building was completed.

The completion of this structure marked a new step forward in Oshawa's civic development. This was the first modern building to be erected in Oshawa for the

conduct of the public business by any civic body. The Commission can be congratulated for the foresight that persuaded them to erect a structure worthy of the City, and one sufficient enough to meet its requirements for the many years **that** followed since its 1931 opening.

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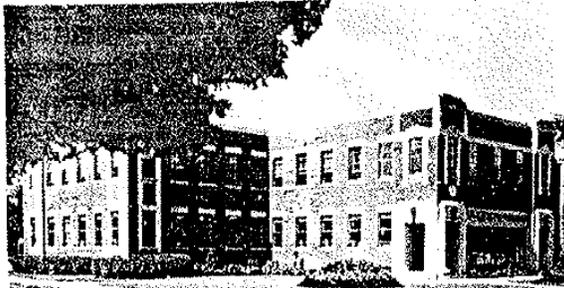
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Addendum

Architectural Description of OPUC -100 Simcoe Street South

Rose Mary Mason

March 2001

The Oshawa Public Utilities Commission building is a vernacular example of the Art Deco style (see John Blumenson's Ontario Architecture). In 1931 it would have been described as an example of the "modernistic trend" in architecture. However the term modernistic is synonymous with Art Moderne a style whose characteristics are not evident in this building.

Both Art Deco and Art Moderne speak to industrialized building trends with streamlined profiles and simplified detailing. Art Deco incorporates abstracted historically inspired detail, whereas Art Moderne shows disdain for historicism.

The Art Deco (1925-1940) influences are seen in this building in the strongly accentuated corners and the allusions to pediments over some of the windows. Note also the simplified entablatures over the doors and the parapeted towers on the corners. The building is streamlined, has a low profile, with contrasting surface materials (red brick and artificial stone). The stone work provides low sculptural relief. Some decoration and metalwork is seen in the vertical grooves over the doors, and the grillwork of the second floor window railings. The octagonal lanterns and even the font of the inscribed frieze echo other Art Deco buildings such as the YWCA building in Toronto.

Art Moderne or modernistic (1930 -1945) buildings were also streamlined, with low profiles and flat roofs. Yet they stressed the horizontal with bands of continuous windows, often used stainless steel as trim, and incorporated curved or smooth walls. Most importantly, historical detail was absent.

The Oshawa Public Utilities Commission building exhibits attributes that are the hallmark of the Art Deco style.