

Ottawa, Ontario  
**Rideau Hall Complex**  
Gasometer (Dome Building)

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The gasometer was erected in 1877-78 to enclose an iron holder or tank of coal gas. The building was designed by J.W.H. Watts of the Chief Architect's Branch at the Department of Public Works. It apparently ceased functioning as a gas-holder house in the early twentieth century and was converted for use as a laundry in 1912. It is now used by the Government House administration (mail, records, etc.). The old gasometer, now known as the Dome Building, is currently administered by the National Capital Commission and is located 200 m northeast of the main house. See FHBRO Building Report 86-24 (2b).

### **Reason for Designation**

The gasometer was designated Recognized because of the unchanged historical relationship between the building and the distinguished landscape at Rideau Hall, because of its visual qualities as a surviving example of an unusual building type, and because of its functional qualities in the context of engineering history.

Gasometers were constructed in England, as early as 1825, primarily for coal gas used for illumination. They were used perhaps more for aesthetic and psychological reasons than to simply protect the lifting tank and machinery from the weather. In Canada, the enclosing house (as opposed to free-standing tanks with containing structural skeleton) was a necessity to keep the guides and pulleys protected and to prevent freezing of water in the holder pit that formed a seal to prevent loss of gas while allowing the tank to rise and fall.

The functionally cylindrical building is well-sited within the Rideau Hall grounds, repeating the octagonal and circular forms found elsewhere in the ancillary structures and landscape features. It is also noteworthy as an architecturally fine example of this type of engineering work, once found throughout the northeast US and eastern Canada, few of which survive.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the gasometer is determined by its surviving exterior materials and form which provide a successful transition between its utilitarian requirements of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and its place in the cultural landscape which is today's Rideau Hall.

Elements of the building's exterior which define its character include the ventilator or lantern; the conical roof (structure and finishes); the unencumbered stucco-covered brick superstructure supported on stone foundation

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## **Rideau Hall Complex**

### Gasometer (Dome Building) (Continued)

walls; and the clean, repetitive fenestration. The original design as a solitary ancillary building is little altered and should be retained without visual intrusions to the immediate site or to the building's exterior.

The pattern and appearance of the different types of multi-paned windows, centrally placed between the brick pilasters, also contributes to the building's character.

With the loss of the original tank and associated hardware at least 75 years ago, the building's interior is less significant. Changes in use should not require intrusions to the exterior and immediate site. Most important, care must be taken to ensure that future landscape work does not compromise the gasometer's physical relationship with its historical landscape.