

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
Power House
Sault Ste. Marie Canal

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Power House on the Sault Ste. Marie Canal was built in 1894 by Ryan and Haney, contractors, to designs prepared under J.B. Spence of the Department of Railways and Canals. It is now the property of Environment Canada. See FHBRO Building Report 85-07.

Reason for Designation

On June 10, 1986, the Power House was designated Classified because of its representation of an important theme in Canadian history, and because of its very good design and craftsmanship. It also reinforces the character of its setting and is something of a local landmark.

The St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes provided Canada's original east-west transportation axis, and the development of this transportation network is a dominant theme in Canadian history. Construction of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal began in 1889, with the first ship passing through the locks in 1895. The complex of buildings, of which the Power House is one of the better known, was completed by 1904, and illustrate the crucial years when Sault Ste. Marie was transformed from a small community into a modern industrial centre.

The Power House in its architectural style is a highly eclectic building in the classical tradition. Its functional design is uniquely adapted to the site and the power generating requirement. The construction of a power house at the site is itself noteworthy; the Sault Ste. Marie Canal was one of the first canals in the world to use electricity generated on site rather than hydraulic power to work the lock gates.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this property is defined by the landscape setting, the building relationships to one another, the building exterior, and the layout and furnishing of the interior as they relate to the original functional design.

The relationship between the complex of canal buildings and its associated landscape has remained virtually unchanged since the time of construction. The industrial and commercial use of the property has always been combined with an interest in beautification, as illustrated by on-going horticultural activity and public use.

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It is important that the setting for the Power House, both its immediate landscape surroundings and its relationship to the overall topography and organization of the site, be maintained. This effort should include the protection of circulation patterns, of mature plants, and of other landscape elements of historic precedent, which signify the above uses and interests associated with the property.

The building exterior, of red sandstone with limestone quoins, window surrounds and sills, varies because of terrain and functional requirements. Some features such as the pedimented south façade have been obscured, but the east and north façades still clearly display the three different levels of fenestration, including the distinctive oculi windows at the second storey. It is important that these façades, including surviving period windows and doors, be protected and conserved, and that missing or obscured aspects of the original design be recovered or restored as the opportunity arises. A similar approach should be taken to the interior, which is a multi-level arrangement with much of the early machinery and fittings still intact.