

Sault Ste Marie
Municipal Heritage Committee

A Report and Recommendation to the
Corporation of the City of Sault Ste Marie
that the

Sault Ste Marie District Courthouse

**Be designated as a Building of Architectural and Historical Significance under the
Ontario Heritage Act**



**Report prepared by Roger Kinghorn & Chris Tossell
November 28, 2003**

Introduction

The Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee is comprised of members interested in heritage conservation with expertise in a number of related fields such as local history and architecture. The members are appointed by Council and recommend to Council significant properties of cultural heritage value or interest for designation under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee has examined the structure known as the Courthouse located at 426 Queen Street East in the City of Sault Ste. Marie and recommends to Council that this structure be designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee has consulted with the owner of this building (Ontario Realty Corporation) and the owner has indicated that it has no objection to the designation of this structure.

An Information sheet outlining the designation process is included with this report.

Architectural Description

The Sault Ste. Marie District Courthouse was constructed by the Ontario Department of Public Works between 1919 and 1922. It was designed by Frank R. Heakes, their Chief Architect.

Heakes succeeded to the post as Chief Architect in 1896, following in the footsteps of his more well known predecessor, Keval Tully, a noted Toronto architect who had held the post from 1867 to 1896. Whereas Tully's northern Ontario courthouses had been built to accommodate the judicial process at minimal cost, budgets during Heakes term were increased with the province feeling it a priority to replace the pioneer courthouses with more substantial buildings.

The first Sault Ste. Marie Courthouse and Jail for example, had been built in 1865 and somewhat resembled a large house. Between 1900 and the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, new courthouses were designed by Heakes in Bracebridge, Sudbury, Kenora, Fort Frances and Haileybury.

Photos of these buildings show how Heakes developed his designs from building to building, utilizing extensively decorated brick masonry, utilizing stone for the entrances, string courses, and other detailing. Internal features almost inevitably contained large entrance halls with a central grand staircase leading to the upper floors with skylights. Finishes were of high quality with extensive use of polished oak and decorative plasterwork.

The architectural design style utilized by Heakes is now described as Beaux-Arts Classicism. The term derives from an architectural style brought to North America by

American and Canadian architects who trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. The composition of their designs were based on Greek and Roman precedents, hence the 'Classicism'. Designs were almost inevitably symmetrical and the structures always incorporated columns, cornices, parapets, and temple fronts. The style was popularized at the 1893 Worlds Fair in Chicago.

It would appear that after the completion of the Sault Ste. Marie Courthouse in 1922, Frank Heakes was only involved with further major project, the design of the Thunder Bay Courthouse (now called the Superior Court of Justice), which was constructed in 1924. Photos indicate that the two upper floors are an almost direct repetition of the Sault Ste. Marie design.

Exterior

The Sault Ste. Marie Courthouse was well sited. Well back from Queen Street, raised and approached by a formal semi-circular driveway.

The courthouse plan is a basic symmetrical rectangle some 90'0" deep by 142 feet long at the front.

The symmetrical south elevation presents a classical façade to Queen Street and is three storeys in height with a full basement. The main entrance is accessed by six wide steps up to centrally located double entrance doors. The exterior walls from ground level to the main floor are of ashlar, rough face stone topped with a sawn stone double cap course. From the main floor upwards, the façade is of a bark textured orangey/brown face brick. The face brick to the south has been very carefully detailed by laying one course recessed five courses flush followed by one course recessed and repeated for the height of the first floor to produce a rusticated effect. All windows are six paned in recessed panels, having five pointed arches in brick with a stone keystone.

The double glazed entrance doors are of oak and are surmounted by a glazed fanlight within a roman arch.

The temple front to the courthouse commences at the courthouse second floor level (the piano nobile) and consists of four ionic columns supporting a brick pediment framed with a raking cornice of painted galvanized metal. There is dentil moulding to the underside of both the raking and horizontal cornice. The tympanum of brick contains a centered stone shield. Two runs of horizontal painted metal cornice extend the full length of the south façade.

The east and west elevations are plainer versions of the south. Unfortunately the side entrance doors have been replaced with aluminum. A barrier free ramp has been installed at the west entrance and a contemporarily designed Sally Port for the transfer of prisoners has been attached on the north end of the west elevation.

The all brick north elevation is again a plainer version of the south but also contains the windows to Court Room No. 1 (see interiors). These consist of three roman arched

windows, larger than the others in this façade. The position of these windows and the courtroom behind is emphasized by the installation of four square stone panels between each window. The stones contain a raised circular centre (Refer to photo #)

It should be noted that although the north, east and west elevations contain less ornament than the south there the same level of meticulous brick detailing has been applied maintaining individuality and interest throughout.

Interior

The courthouse contains three major interior features:

1. Central Staircase: an 8'0" wide grand stairs centered on the main entrance splitting to both right and left at the half landing and returning back to second floor level. The balustrading is of ornamental wrought iron with hardwood handrail. The paneling to the staircase is of quarter-sawn oak.
2. Centered over the staircase is an illuminated stained or painted glass ceiling divided into three segments. Natural light is provided by a large roof mounted skylight over. Each segment of the glass ceiling contains a circular decorative motif (required further detailed description)
3. Court Room No. 1: Court Room No. 1 is the preeminent feature of the Courthouse, little altered from its original design. This courtroom can only be discussed as extremely imposing. Of classical double cube dimensions all focus is on the raised judicial bench. Wood paneling to a dado, which encircles the entire room, is of oak. The walls above are subdivided by double pilasters with Corinthian capitals. We are extremely fortunate that upgrading over the years to this courtroom have been carried out with great sympathy for the original design.

Sault Ste. Marie is fortunate in possessing a courthouse-designed band built at the peak of Frank Heakes' career as Chief Architect to the Ontario Department of Public Works.

Historical Significance

The present building is the second court house to sit on the site. The first courthouse and jail were built in 1866. At that time the courts were moved from the residence of Sheriff Carney in the "Old Stone House". The original court house and jail were demolished in 1921 and the current court house built at a cost of \$350,000.00 was opened in 1922 by Mayor Dawson. The growing economy of the city and province, as well as the increased role of local government, demanded a courthouse, which was more functional and symbolically reflective of the judicial system.

Originally the courthouse contained several government offices, however as the needs of the court expanded the various offices moved out. Always a community focal point, the site hosted such visits as that of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught in 1912. In 1924

the cenotaph honoring the soldiers of World War I, with its dedication verse composed by Rudyard Kipling, was unveiled in front of the courthouse by the Governor General, Lord Byng.

Over the years many interesting cases have been heard in the Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District Court House by equally interesting judges. One judge of historical note is the late I.A. Vannini who practiced law for 47 years and when appointed to the Ontario Bench in 1966 was the first person of Italian descent to hold such office. One of his landmark decisions was the ruling out of evidence obtained through the use of police wiretaps. The law library, which sits to the right of the courthouse, is named in his honour.

In *Early Canadian Courthouses* Margaret Carter suggests that the evolution of the courthouse such as in Sault Ste. Marie reflected four interrelated factors:

1. Growing role of the district and county as the agency of local government.
2. Growing sophistication of public standards in civic architecture
3. Growing role of the professional architect.
4. Economic expansion which allowed the Provincial Government to build court houses which were more functional and reflected the importance of the judicial system.

Conclusion

The Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee, after careful review, recommends that the structure known as the Sault Ste. Marie and District of Algoma Courthouse be designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. The reasons for designation are:

- The staircase with the illuminated glass ceiling over the stairwell – the only example of this type of ceiling in the City of Sault Ste. Marie.
- Court Room No. 1 – has been altered very little since erection of the courthouse.

Bibliography

Early Canadian Courthouses, edited by Margaret Carter, Ontario Section by Kelly Crossman and Dana Johnson, Parkes Canada 1983.

A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles-Leslie Maitland et al ISBN 1-55111-002-4
Ontario Heritage Foundation Muskoka District Courthouse Plaque

Well Preserved-OHF Manual for Architectural Conservation-Mark Fram ISBN 0-919783-42-2

Information on the Superior Court of Justice Thunder Bay from the Doors Open Ontario Thunder Bay Web Page.

Note the original Courthouse drawings are held by the Archives of Ontario

Exterior and Interior Photos are appended.

INFORMATION MANUAL

Subject: Request For A Heritage Designation

Department: Recreation & Culture

Source: Manager, Recreation & Culture

Date: 2003 06 13

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PURPOSE

The *Ontario Heritage Act* enables Municipalities to designate properties of cultural heritage value or interest, individually (Part IV), or to designate heritage conservation districts (Part V). Designation is not only a recognition of the significance of a property or district but it also provides a measure of protection from demolition and unsympathetic alteration.

REQUESTS

Those property owners that wish to apply for a Heritage Designation pursuant to the Ontario Heritage Act can obtain an application Form from the Recreation and Culture Division.

DEADLINE

The completed request shall be returned to the Recreation & Culture Division, Community Services Department. All completed requests will be placed on the next available Agenda of the Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee.

Applications are accepted throughout the year.

CRITERIA

The Sault Ste. Marie Municipal Heritage Committee uses the following criteria when evaluating a property:

* A property may be of cultural heritage value or significance if it is associated with the life of an outstanding member of the community or has played a role in an important historical event.

* A building may be of architectural significance if it is a good example of a particular building type, architectural style or period, or if it is the work of an important architect or early builder.

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CRITERIA CON'T

* A building may also have contextual significance if it forms an integral part of the surrounding streetscape.

* A property may be of cultural heritage value or significance if it possesses unique aesthetic or picturesque qualities.

* A property may be of cultural heritage value or significance if it incorporated the use of local sandstone in the building construction, particularly from the Sault Ste. Marie Canal excavation.

RECREATION & CULTURE DIVISION

The Manager of Recreation & Culture shall summarize all information received from property owners for review and consideration by the Municipal Heritage Committee.

REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Municipal Heritage Committee shall analyze all applications and recommend to City Council those applications most deserving of a Heritage Designation pursuant to the Ontario Heritage Act.

The request to City Council will include a detailed report on the property and the reasons for designation prepared by the members of the Municipal Heritage Committee.

ELIGIBILITY

Requests for designations is restricted to property owners of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

NOTIFICATION OF DECISION AND REVIEW

All applicants are to be notified in writing following City Council's decision.

POLICY & APPLICATION

A complete package and application form is available from the Recreation & Culture Division.