

# Heritage Brief CPR Telegraph Building

City of Greater Sudbury Municipal Heritage  
Advisory Panel

## 2012



# CPR TELEGRAPH BUILDING HERITAGE BRIEF

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## Context

The CPR Telegraph building is an iconic landmark located at the corner of Elgin and Elm Streets in downtown Greater Sudbury. It is recognized for its part in the railway heritage connected to the founding of the community of Sudbury in the City's Official Plan. The Official Plan also calls for its preservation and protection from inappropriate development.

Laurentian University's offer to purchase the Market Square property from the City of Greater Sudbury includes the CPR Telegraph Building, for the site of the future Laurentian School of Architecture. It is proposed that the CPR Telegraph Building will be adaptively reused as part of the new School.

The City of Greater Sudbury's Municipal Heritage Advisory Panel is tasked with advising and assisting Council on matters related to the conservation of property of cultural heritage value or interest and with respect to preserving and developing Heritage Resources in the City.

The purpose of this Heritage Brief is to provide Council, Laurentian University and the community with the Heritage Panel's comments with respect to the preservation and protection of the CPR Telegraph building for future generations as it is repurposed into a School of Architecture.

## History

The CPR Telegraph and Ticket Office has been identified as one of the best surviving examples of railway architecture constructed locally since Sudbury's earliest days as a junction of major rail lines.<sup>1</sup>

In 1914, the CPR found it necessary to construct a Ticket and Telegraph office at 9 Elgin Street South in downtown Sudbury due to the community's expanding population and growing industrial importance. It was one of the few large repeating offices on the CPR railway line between Montreal and Vancouver, with others located in Fort William, Winnipeg, Swift Current, Moose Jaw and Calgary. Separate from railway station located further south on Elgin Street, this substantial two-storey brick building was constructed by Messrs. Sherwood and Sherwood of Sudbury.<sup>2</sup>

The building was constructed in three phases. The first phase is the two storey section located at the southwest corner of Elm and Elgin Street, built in 1914. The second phase was located to the rear of the first phase along Elgin Street and was built in approximately 1930/31. At this time the telegraph offices were moved to the new addition and the ground floor of the old building with entrances at Elm and Elgin Street was taken over by the City of Sudbury as an office for the City Treasurer, with a portion of

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<sup>1</sup> Sudbury Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee. "1990 Heritage Landmark" Sudbury. 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, M., Gorrie, M., Kelly, B., Mullally, C., Prevost, C. and Trainor, P. *Inventory and Guide to Historic Buildings in Sudbury*. Sudbury: Department of History Laurentian University. 1978.

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the ground floor retained by CPR for a ticket office. The second floor of the old building was then used by the City for the public library, with an entrance off of Elgin Street.<sup>3</sup>

In 1949, the freight offices of the CPR moved into newly modernized offices in the building at the corner of Elm and Elgin Streets.<sup>4</sup>

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1980 the last telegraph message was sent from the CPR Telegraph Building, after CN-CP Telecommunications announced the office's closure after more than 50 years in the same location due to lack of business. At the time of its closure, the telegraph office employed 3 people. CN-CP also closed six other telegraph offices across Canada on the same day, including offices in Prince Rupert and Vernon B.C, Cornwall ON and Sherbrooke, Rouyn and Gaspé Que.<sup>5</sup>

The CPR Telegraph building was acquired by the City in 1999.

## Building Location and Design

### *CPR Building Location and Context*

The most significant feature of the building is the presence it commands at one of the most historic intersections in the downtown core. Built right to the street line, the two storey all brick structure has been a landmark in the downtown since its construction almost 100 years ago. It anchors one corner of an intersection that was/is home to some of downtown Sudbury's other historic buildings, namely the Sterling Standard Bank Building immediately across the street on Elm which now serves as a men's clothing store.

At the time the CPR Building was constructed, the Balmoral Hotel, a three storey brick hotel with projecting balcony, stood on the northeast corner of the intersection. The Balmoral was one of many turn of the century hotels, including the Nickel Range and King Edward Hotels, which once served the bustling railway traffic in Sudbury.

The most significant feature of the CPR Telegraph building is the manner in which it defines the intersection by being built right to the street line, with its two storey construction providing a pedestrian scale in the area. The absence of building setbacks is a feature that can also be seen in the other historic buildings in the immediate area and also in the newly constructed Shopper's Drug Mart building across the street. Any additions to the building should be sympathetic to the existing building in terms of scale, location and height.

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<sup>3</sup> "New Building Now Occupied – CPR Telegraphs Have More Commodious Quarters". Sudbury Star. January 31, 1931. p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> "New CPR Freight Office Opened in Sudbury". Sudbury Star. March 8, 1949. p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> "Telegraph office almost history". Sudbury Star. January 15, 1980. p. 3

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Figures 1a. b. c & d (clockwise from top left) – 1a Aerial showing CPR Building at property line, 1b Aerial showing Elgin at Elm Street circa 1960's, 1c Aerial of Elm Street circa 1980's and 1d Photo showing new Shoppers Drug Mart building built at property line.



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## ***CPR Building Design and Construction***

Built in 1914, the two-storey brick structure with cut stone trim is separate and distinct from the CPR Station located further south on Elgin Street.<sup>6</sup> The design represents Edwardian Classicism through its simple balanced design, straight roof lines, uncomplicated ornament and relatively maintenance free detailing. Edwardian buildings are noted for their smooth brick faces and abundance of windows.

Building materials such as cement, lime, sand, drain tile, joisting, studding, rough and dressed lumbers, sash door frame mouldings, stairs, floors, interior fittings etc., in both pine and hardwood were supplied by the Evans Co. Limited.<sup>7</sup>

The strong image of the building, and its architectural quality, does not have any pedestrian related functions, except at the corner, where the presence of the restaurant gives this prominent face of the building much needed vitality.<sup>8</sup>

The application of trim and fixtures used in the second floor offices echoes the high quality craftsmanship and confident design of the exterior. Generous use of marble, clay tile in the washrooms, hardwood doors, and trim finished with brass hardware accentuate the open concept office space that has remained virtually untouched since the 1950's.

The CPR Telegraph building was a prominent office building in the community of Sudbury. It reflected a sense of confidence in the Company, the railroad industry and Sudbury. Additions, alterations or modifications to the building in its new life as part of the Laurentian School of Architecture should also retain this level of quality.

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<sup>6</sup> Sudbury Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee. "1990 Heritage Landmark" Sudbury. 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, M., Gorrie, M., Kelly, B., Mullally, C., Prevost, C. and Trainor, P. *Inventory and Guide to Historic Buildings in Sudbury*. Sudbury: Department of History Laurentian University. 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Dewit + Castellan Architects Inc. "Façade Improvement Programme". Prepared for Sudbury Metro Centre. 1987.

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## **Significant Features:**

The purpose of this Heritage Brief is to provide Council with the Heritage Advisory Panel's comments on exterior and interior features of the building that should be preserved, refurbished and/or replicated during its adaptive reuse in order to meet the policy of the City's Official Plan to protect the building from inappropriate development, including:

Building symmetry and geometrical relationship of the brickwork	Stone and Brick Window Treatment	Eventual Removal of One Storey Addition to South Façade
Concrete Cornices, Storefront Level Cornice and Copper Flashing	Windows	Remaining Telegraph Hardware and Signage
Ceiling Height and Rounded Edges / Centre Stairwell and Basement	Doors, Trim and Transoms	Reusing and/or Replicating Existing Hardware

## ***Exterior Features:***

In addition to the stance and presence that the building commands at the corner of the Elm and Elgin Streets, there are also a number of unique design features of the building that should be preserved or enhanced as part of its adaptive reuse into the future Laurentian School of Architecture.



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## **Building symmetry and geometrical relationship of the brickwork**

The two storey rectangular symmetry of the building should be maintained, along with the geometrical placement of the windows and the corresponding brick and stone work around the windows and doors.



**Figure 2 - West facade of building showing rectangular shape and symmetry of windows.**



**Figure 3 - South elevation of building along Elgin Street showing the repetition and the grouping of elements (windows).**

**Figure 4 - North elevation of building along Elm Street showing the repetition and the grouping of elements (windows).**



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## Stone and Brick Window Treatment

The stone and brick detailing around the windows and entrances should be preserved and replicated where necessary to accommodate renovations.

**Figure 4 - Close up of window showing plain stone sills.**



**Figure 5 - Close up showing plain stone lintels and corbelling of masonry around windows.**



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### **One Storey Addition to South Facade**

The third addition to the building (one storey on south façade) is not crucial to the overall design of the building and does not keep with the two storey presence of the rest of the CPR Building. This addition may be removed should the opportunity arise.

**Figure 6 - One storey addition as seen from Elgin Street**



**Figure 7 - One storey addition as seen from market building. Note “boxed” cornice treatment above second storey.**

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## Concrete Cornices, Storefront Level Cornice and Copper Flashing

Some of the most prominent architectural features of the exterior of the building include the stone cornices and peaks that accentuate the top of the building. Also important from a design aspect is the storefront level cornice on the Elgin and Elm Street frontages of the building which delineates the first and second storeys.

A 1987 report on the building identified that the original cornice appeared to have been roofed in copper. This however appears to have been replaced by one in prefinished steel which, unfortunately, projects too far out, disrupting the buildings profile. The study identified this as a minor consideration that should be rectified if the building is ever fully renovated.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 8 - Concrete cornices. Note “boxed” cornice treatment applied sparingly**



**Figure 10 -Cornice between first and second storey on Elgin Street façade showing copper flashing.**



**Figure 9 - Stone front gable to differentiate the main public entrance.**

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<sup>9</sup> Dewit + Castellan Architects Inc. “Façade Improvement Programme”. Prepared for Sudbury Metro Centre. 1987.

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## Windows

Adding to the symmetry of the CPR Telegraph building are the original double hung windows. Arranged in groupings of two or three, this window design and spacing solidifies the building's presence at the corner of Elgin and Elm Street. Acknowledging that the original windows are single pane and most likely not very energy efficient, every effort should be made to fabricate new windows that maintain the materiality and appearance of the original double hung wood frame windows. New windows should fit within the original openings.

**Figure 11- Three window opening with original double hung windows.**



**Figure 12 - Single window openings with original double hung wood frame windows.**



**Figure 13 - Interior photo showing double hung windows.**



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Some window openings on the ground floor have been boarded up, most likely due to safety and vandalism concerns. These boarded up openings should be uncovered as part of the refurbishment and adaptive reuse of the building.

**Figure 14 - Boarded up window opening on west façade.**



**Figure15 - Boarded up window openings and modified entrance on west façade.**

**Figure 16 - Boarded up windows and entrances on Elgin Street façade.**





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### Remaining Telegraph Hardware and Signage

Even though the building has not sent or received a telegraph in more than 30 years, some hardware still exists on the exterior of the building that relates back to the building's important past. This remaining hardware and street signage should be left in place or repurposed where appropriate to celebrate the building's former use.



Figure 17 - Remaining telegraph hardware on south facade of building.



Figure 18 - Elm Street signage on north façade.

Figure 19 - Remaining telegraph hardware.





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### ***Interior Features:***

The interior of the CPR Telegraph building differs greatly in terms of the number of alterations that have taken place over the years. Many modifications have been made to the ground floor, mainly to accommodate the current tenants. The first quarter of the ground floor facing Elm Street is currently occupied by a restaurant, a use that has existed for some time. The remaining three quarters of the ground floor is occupied by a telecommunications switching station. This use has resulted in substantial modifications to the ground floor, with very few remaining visual ties to the building's original use; one of which is the vault.

By contrast, the second floor of the building has been "frozen in time" from the 1950's, with very few modifications made to the former CPR office space. The interior is a fine example of early twentieth century office planning and design, with many interesting features including glass transoms over the doors, oak trim, wainscoting, burlap wall covering, glue chip glass panels, wood paneling, rounded ceilings, along with frosted and stenciled glass doors.

The high quality craftsmanship and refined finish of the office space reflects the confidence of CPR and the City of Sudbury at the time and the same use of premium materials should be seen in any addition or alteration of the space. When adaptively reusing the building, special attention should be given to preserving the existing second floor office space in its original condition and layout.

That being said, there are several unique features that characterize the interior of the CPR Telegraph building that merit special consideration and preservation.

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### **Ceiling Height and Rounded Edges**

One of the most important features of the second floor office space is the generous ceiling height and craftsmanship that went into making the rounded corners between the ceiling and the walls, which is reminiscent of a railway car. The ceiling height and rounded corners should remain as part of the adaptive reuse of the space.

**Figure 20- Photo demonstrating ceiling height and rounded corners.**



**Figure 21 - Rounded ceiling corners.**

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## Doors, Trim and Transoms

The characteristics of the 1950's style second floor office space are captured through the use of hardwood doors and trim throughout the space. Adding to the ambiance are the glass transoms above each door that were used to provide ventilation. Given the quality of the doors and trim, they should be preserved and reused, ideally in their existing locations. Additionally, the transoms above each doorway should remain or be reused.

Special consideration should also be given to reusing the glass door with the CPR Logo that remains in the basement of the building. Reusing this door in a prominent location as part of the new School of Architecture would be a great asset to the new school and would help tie it to the building's past.



Figure 22 - Hardwood office door and trim.



Figure 23 - Glass door with CPR Logo.



Figure 24- Transom above door.

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### Reusing and/or Replicating Existing Hardware

Part of the office feel of the second floor of the CPR Telegraph Building is the use of top of the line (at the time) fixtures and hardware. Some of this hardware on doors and in the washrooms is still in excellent shape and working order. In most cases, this hardware should be reused to maintain the 1950's office ambiance of the second floor. Where new hardware is required, it should be replicated based on the existing examples, or other "high end" hardware should be used.



Figure 25 - Existing door hardware.



Figure 26 - Existing door hardware.

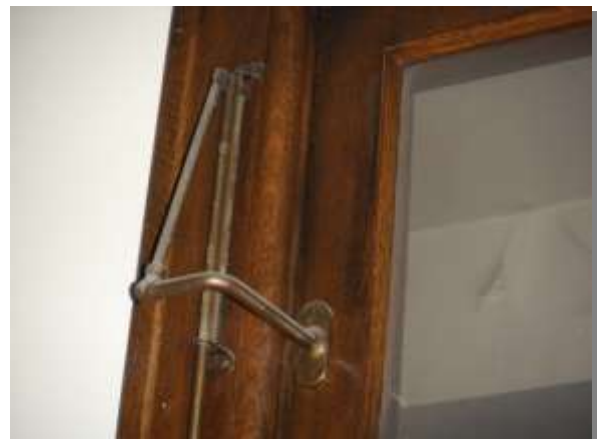


Figure 27 - Existing hardware.

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### Centre Stairwell and Basement

Recognizing that there will still be a need to maintain separation between the first and second floors to accommodate the existing tenants, the future plans for the building should include reopening the centre stairwell which has currently been closed off.

Additionally, the basement of the CPR Building holds many examples of unique construction techniques and methods that date back to when the building was constructed. These artifacts should be retained as a first option, or put on display in the building as a second option. Some of the relevant characteristics of the basement include the railway rails, timber supports and the vault.



Figure 28 - Bannister in closed off stairwell.



Figure 29 - Rails used as support.



Figure 30 - Basement vault.



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## Conclusion

The CPR Telegraph Building at the corner of Elm and Elgin Streets is one of Sudbury's historically significant buildings, with ties to the community's early days as an important railway junction. The building's importance is captured in the City's Official Plan preserving and protecting it from "inappropriate" development.

Laurentian University is purchasing the Market Square site from the City of Greater Sudbury as the site for the future School of Architecture. This represents a tremendous opportunity to adaptively reuse the CPR Telegraph Building for a purpose worthy of its stature in the downtown. It is acknowledged that in order to change the use of the building for this purpose, certain upgrades will be required that will necessitate the alteration of the building (i.e. new HVAC, insulation and energy efficiency measures, barrier free access, etc.).

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Panel's role is to advise Council on heritage matters. The Heritage Advisory Panel also recognizes the important historical value of the CPR Telegraph Building as well as the opportunity to see it fully occupied and adaptively reused as part of the new School of Architecture.

Based on the above, the City of Greater Sudbury Municipal Heritage Advisory Panel is making the following comments and recommendations:

- The CPR Telegraph building is an iconic landmark located at the corner of Elgin and Elm Streets in downtown Greater Sudbury. The City's Official Plan also calls for the building's preservation and protection from inappropriate development;
- The most significant features of the CPR Telegraph building is the manner in which it defines the intersection by being built right to the street line, with its two storey construction providing a pedestrian scale in the area;
- The two storey rectangular symmetry of the building needs to be maintained along with the repetition and grouping of the elements (windows);
- The corbelling of masonry around the windows needs to be preserved along with the plain stone sills and lintels;
- The one storey addition on the south façade of the building should be removed should the opportunity arise;
- The concrete cornices and storefront level cornice and copper flashing are some of the most prominent architectural features of the exterior of the building. The original storefront cornice appears to have been replaced with a prefinished steel one that projects too far out, something that should be rectified when the building is fully renovated;

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- Any new windows should replicate the original double hung wood frame windows and fit in the original openings;
- Any boarded up window or door openings should be uncovered as part of the refurbishment and adaptive reuse of the building;
- Remaining telegraph hardware and street signage should be left in place or repurposed;
- The ceiling height and rounded corners should remain as part of the adaptive reuse of the space;
- Existing interior doors, trim and transoms should remain or be reused;
- Special consideration should be given to reusing the glass door with the CPR logo that remains in the basement;
- The existing door and window hardware should be reused or replicated;
- Future plans for the building should include reopening the centre stairwell; and
- Remaining telegraph artifacts and unique construction methods should be retained and displayed where appropriate.



**Figure 31- A room in the C.P.R. building on Elgin St. used for a library from 1932-1942. Source: Sudbury Public Library.**