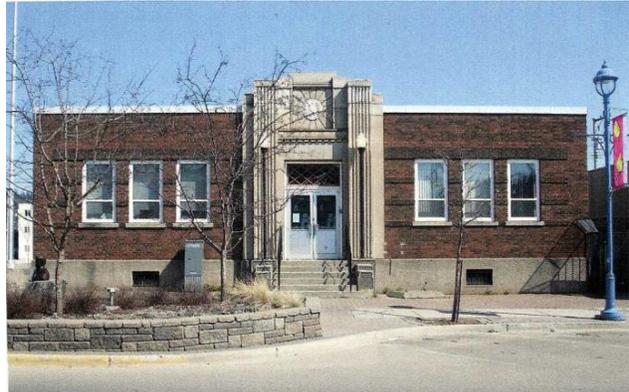


Federal Government Building

Address: 1288 - 1294 Third Avenue
Date of Construction: 1939
Other Names: Old Post Office, Intersect Youth & Family Services building

Heritage Register Classification:
Commercial Building
Date added to Heritage Register:
December 3, 2007



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DESCRIPTION

The Federal Government Building is a one-story 58' by 96' Art Deco-influenced brick and cut-stone structure located at 1294 Third Avenue, at the northeast corner of the intersection with Quebec Street. The building is a designated municipal heritage site under Heritage Designation Bylaw No. 5538, 1990.

HERITAGE VALUE

Historical:

The Federal Government Building, commonly referred to as the Old Post Office, was built in 1939 as the first permanent location for postal, customs and other federal public services in the city of Prince George.

For years, local citizens and politicians had petitioned the federal government for a suitable building to house federal public services, which were then scattered around the city in various rental accommodations. In 1939, the Federal Parliament in Ottawa voted to approve funding for a new, dedicated building.

Construction began in May 1939 under the supervision of Bennett and White Construction Co., a Vancouver firm that was awarded the contract after submitting a tender of \$26,968. By December, the building was complete, and interior fittings manufactured in Preston, Ontario, were soon installed. The new public building officially opened on Monday March 4, 1940.

According to an article published in the *Prince George Citizen* newspaper on March 7, 1940:

The building is of terra cotta backing with a four-inch brick facing, 58 x 61, on a concrete foundation. The frontage on Third Avenue is 58 feet, with 61 feet on Quebec St. The roof is flat and of tar, felt and gravel with a large skylight over the main post-office workroom. The

entrance is on Third Avenue and is of cut stone with two doors finished in plate glass, and the approach from street level is by five concrete steps with approved steel treads, flanked on each side by eight-foot wrought iron electric light standards. Over the entrance is provision for an electric clock, but as there is no master electric clock in town at present, the clock has not been installed.¹

The building also featured a full-size basement and an outside drop-letter box on Quebec Street. An iron picket fence separated a grassy, graded area around the property from the cement sidewalk. The planned electric clock was never installed.

In 1955, an addition was constructed on the rear of the building, extending 35' along Quebec Street and 75' along the back laneway. The addition adheres to the original building plans in terms of architectural design, exterior materials, window patterns, brickwork and style.

The building's first occupants were the local post office and customs office. Located on the west side of the building, the post office included a 30' by 18' public lobby, a screen composed of 704 boxes, and four wickets in a partition finished in walnut and figured glass. The customs office occupied two rooms on the east side of the building. By 1943, the building also housed the Government Telegraph Office and the new Prince George transmitter station for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

In December 1953, the post office moved to new, larger accommodations at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Quebec Street. The old building was occupied by the Unemployment Insurance Commission for several years, then by Health and Welfare Canada. In 1991, the federal government sold the building to private local investors, who sold it one year later, in 1992, to the current owners, the Intersect Youth and Family Services Society.

In 1990, Prince George City Council designated the building a municipal heritage site under Heritage Designation Bylaw No. 5538, 1990.

In 1991, the Prince George Heritage Advisory Committee (precursor to the Heritage Commission) installed a commemorative plaque on the brick façade to the left of the main entrance.

Architecture/Aesthetics:

The Federal Government Building mixes Art Deco and Modern Classical architectural features with the monumentality in design favoured by federal government architects. Although the interior of the building has been modified over time, the exterior today remains much the same as it did when the building was constructed in 1939. The building remains a lasting symbol of 20th century federalism in Prince George. Its remaining heritage value lies in preserving and/or restoring its original façade and exterior elements.

Following Confederation in 1867, the federal government began designing public service buildings that could stand as grand symbols of federalism, prosperity and permanence.

¹ "Post Office and Customs Staff Move to Handsome New Federal Building," *Prince George Citizen*, 7 March 1940, p. 1. (This article contains further information on the interior features of the building.)

Monumentality in design was the order of the day, and that design philosophy carried over to the early 20th century and trickled down to the designs of federal buildings constructed in many smaller urban centres, including Prince George.

Art Deco and Modern Classical architectural styles both gained popularity in the late 1920s and early 1930s and influenced federal building design in the following years.

Art Deco is an assertively modern style that emphasizes symmetry, vertical lines, bold rectilinear shapes and lavish ornamentation. The Federal Government Building's entrance façade is a distinct Art Deco design feature: it is framed by monumental twin pilasters, topped by a decorative entablature, and includes a prominent plinth.² Made from white stone, the ornamental entrance stands out from the dark-coloured brick exterior and rises above the adjacent flat roof lines to provide visual accent for an auspicious entrance.

The Modern Classical style is defined by a revival of hints from earlier Classical designs, such as Georgian, Tudor, etc. The Federal Government Building displays the Georgian features of a symmetrical façade with central entrance.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

The following elements define the heritage value of this site and should be retained during any site renovation:

- Original façade and exterior elements, including but not limited to:
 - exterior dimensions of 58' (fronting Third Avenue) by 61' (flanking Quebec Street), plus a 75' by 35' foot addition on the rear of the building;
 - 4-inch red brick facing;
 - front entrance of white cut stone;
 - twin pilasters flanking the entrance doors;
 - decorative entablature over the front door, with provision for an electric clock;
 - round window with wooden muntins (grid pattern over glass) in place of clock;
 - large window with diagonal wooden muntins above main doors;
 - two 7'-high doors finished in plate glass;
 - two wrought iron lamp standards flanking the entrance;³
 - approach from street level by five concrete steps with approved steel treads;
 - decorative stone plinth projecting out from base of pilasters and flanking steps;
 - flat roof of tar, felt and gravel;
 - large skylight on western portion of roof;
 - outside drop-letter box located on Quebec Street;
 - flag pole with concrete base at southeast corner of property;
 - Art Deco and Modern Classical inspired architectural design.
- Commemorative plaque (1991) mounted on brick façade to left of main entrance.

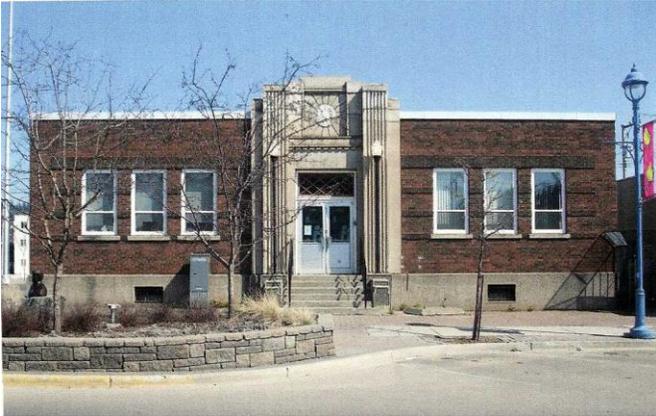
² A *pilaster* is a flattened, rectangular column projecting slightly from a wall and used for support or ornamentation.

An *entablature* is the horizontal architectural detailing above or supported by columns or pilasters. It usually rises in horizontal layers up to or over the roof line.

A *plinth* is the base or foot of a column or pedestal. It can also refer to the projecting stone coursing that forms a platform for a building.

³ The lamps standards were originally 8' tall; they have since been raised to discourage vandalism.

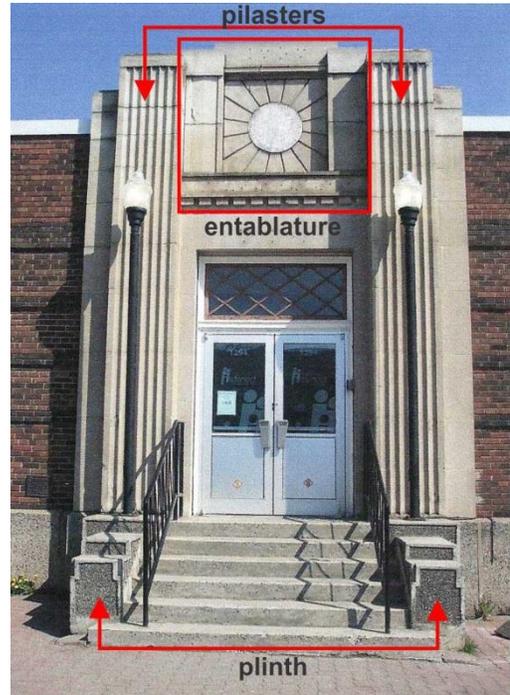
IMAGES



Federal Government Building, main façade, fronting Third Avenue, 2011. (Photo: Trelle Morrow)



Federal Government Building, 1939. (Photo: The Exploration Place [N993.11.1.2205.5](#))



Entrance façade exhibiting Art Deco design features, 2011. (Photo: Trelle Morrow)

OTHER INFORMATION

- **Architect:** [C. D. Sutherland](#), chief architect, Department of Public Works, Ottawa
- **Builder:** Bennett & White Construction Co., Vancouver (general contractor)
- **Legal description:** Lots 19, 20 and Parcel A (11170M) of Lot 18, Block 44, District Lot 343, Plan 1268
- **Level of Heritage Recognition:** Heritage Designation (City of Prince George Heritage Designation Bylaw No. 5538, 1990)

SOS research compiled by Trelle Morrow, 2011.

SOS prepared by Caroline Ross (Prince George Heritage Commission), April 2016.