

CULTURAL HERITAGE EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared By: Heritage Planning Branch, August 2023

Building Name and Address: 290 City Centre Avenue

Construction Date: 1925

Original Owner: W.C. Edwards & Company



Executive Summary

290 City Centre is a one-and-a-half storey, red brick commercial-use building. Constructed circa 1925. Its design features elements of Spanish Colonial Revival influences.

The building was originally constructed as an office for W.C. Edwards and Company, one of the largest early lumber companies in Eastern Ontario. From 1925 until the 1960s, the building sat in western Ottawa's industrial hub. When the area was de-industrialized in the 1960s, the building was used as a commercial space by various businesses. The building at 290 City Centre is one of the last remnants of the area's industrial history.

The property has cultural heritage value for its design, associative and contextual values. It meets five of the nine criteria for designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Architecture

Built circa 1925, the building at 290 City Centre is a one and a half storey, red brick commercial building. The property is located on the north side of Somerset Street in the City Centre complex. The City Centre complex is located between Albert Street, Somerset Street, City Centre Avenue (formerly Champagne Avenue) and the Trillium O-Train line. In the late 19th century, and for the first half of the 20th century, the City Centre area was an industrial area with lumber yards, coal yards, and railway tracks. The building at 290 City Centre was originally constructed as an office space for W.C. Edwards and Company—one of the largest early lumber companies in Ottawa. The architect or builder of the building is unknown.

The building at 290 City Centre is a unique example of a vernacular style building with Spanish Colonial Revival influence. The building consists of a simple design with rectangular massing and a symmetrical façade. The building's detailing includes a steeply pitched roof with a visible dormer on the rear elevation and exposed rafter tails at the roofline. The building also features large rectangular one-over-one sash windows, brick quoins, a stone string course, and a central entrance identified by a decorative gabled dormer with a curvilinear parapet. The front entrance is raised and accessed by a set of stairs lined with brick knee walls capped with stone. The wooden front door is surrounded by sidelites and a large, curved transom window above. Brick detailing around the door accentuate the

curvature of the opening, further highlighted by a stone keystone and end voussoirs. The building also includes a raised basement with doors that open to ground level. In 2016, the front and side porches were added to the building. There are no other known major exterior alterations.



Front (south) entrance and curvilinear gable Source: City of Ottawa



West elevation

Source: City of Ottawa



East elevation

Source: City of Ottawa



Rear (north) elevation

Source: City of Ottawa

The building's interior features a central hall with high ceilings and large rooms, once used as offices, on either side of the hallway. The vestibule has a large arched transom and side lights to match the front entrance. A large vault by Toronto's J&J Taylor Safe Company is built into the rear of the building's first storey. J&J Taylor was one of the most successful manufacturers of safes in North America during the second half of the 19th century. This fireproof safe would likely have been used to house important documents and money.¹



Interior of front entrance Source: City of Ottawa

¹ "The J&J Taylor Safe Company," *HouseStories.ca*, 2013.



Door to J&J Taylor Safe

Source: City of Ottawa



J&J Taylor branding on safe

Source: City of Ottawa

The building is a representative example of a vernacular interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style in Ottawa. The building's distinct stepped and curved parapet, arched openings, and roof overhangs evokes the Spanish Colonial Revival style.² The Spanish Colonial Revival style was most common in Canada from the 1910s to the 1940s and was often used for institutional and commercial buildings.³ During the early twentieth century in Ottawa, vernacular interpretation of architectural styles was especially prominent in public and non-

² Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Vol 2 (1994). page 741.

³ Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, "Spanish Colonial Revival Style," *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles: Second Edition* (2003), page 157.

residential buildings where a cost-effective and functional design was prioritized.⁴ Other examples of buildings that were influenced by this style in Ottawa include the Rideau Street Library, 377 Rideau Street (1933), Champagne Bath, 321 King Edward Avenue (1924), and the Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Avenue (1921).



Rideau Street Library, 377 Rideau Street



Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Avenue

⁴ Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Vol 2 (1994). page 741.



Champagne Bath, 321 King Edward Avenue

Photo sources: City of Ottawa

The building is also a rare example of architecture associated with the historic industrial character of the area. Its design is reflective of the importance both the lumber industry and the prominence of W.C. Edwards and Company the at the time.

History

The property at 290 City Centre has direct associations with W.C. Edwards and Company, one of the largest early lumber companies in Eastern Ontario, and the Edwards family. From 1912 to 1962, the land surrounding the property at 290

City Centre was occupied by the W.C. Edwards and Company's sawmill. The building at 290 City Centre was used as the W.C. Edwards and Company office space from its construction in 1925 until the sawmill's closure in 1962. During this time, the property at 290 City Centre sat in the heart of the area's industrial hub along the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway corridor. From the 1960s onwards, the building was used as a retail space and later, an art gallery. The deindustrialization of the area is reflected in the changing use of the building at 290 City Centre.

W.C. Edwards, the company's founder, had strong ties to the economic development of the Ottawa and Rockland, and was involved in late 19th and early 20th century federal politics. After his retirement and death, the company remained in the Edwards family.

W.C. Edwards and Company

Following the decline of the fur trade and the ongoing European war in the early 19th century, North American timber became extremely valuable. Untouched forests along the Ottawa River and in the Ottawa Valley, as well as access to the St. Lawrence River, allowed the forestry industry to boom in Ottawa.⁵ By the twentieth century, the lumber industry became central to Ottawa's economy. Lumber companies like W.C. Edwards, E.B. Eddy, and J.R. Booth were key players in Ottawa's lumber industry and when the supply of red and white pine diminished, they became innovative producers of pulp and paper in the area.⁶

W.C. Edwards and Company was a lumber company and sawmill established in 1868 by William Cameron Edwards and James Woods. By 1871, John A. Cameron and John C. Edwards were also partners in the company. The W.C. Edwards Company opened their first sawmill at McCaul Point in Rockland,

⁵ Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee, *A Background Study for Nomination of the Ottawa River Under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System*, 2005, 89.

⁶ James Powell, "The Last Timber Raft," *The Historical Society of Ottawa*, accessed December 2023.

Ontario in 1868.⁷ The Edwards' sawmill was integral in the economic development of Rockland, as it was the town's major employer until the mill's closure in 1926.⁸



Interior of the W.C. Edwards Sawmill in Rockland, 1877. *Photo courtesy of Library and Archives Canada.*

In 1894, the W.C. Edwards and Company expanded into Ottawa with the purchase of the sawmill at the Rideau Falls on Sussex Street from the estate of James MacLaren.⁹ The original mills in this location were destroyed by a fire in 1907, but they rebuilt the sawmill with concrete materials in the same year.¹⁰

⁷ "William Cameron Edwards 1844-1921", *Ontario Heritage Trust*.

⁸ "History," *City of Clarence-Rockland*, 2021.

⁹ "Here Was the Backbone... of Our Valley Economy", *The Ottawa Journal*, 17 June 1967.

¹⁰ "Ottawa Lumber Companies in Big \$60,000,000 Merger with Riordon's", *The Ottawa Journal*, 31 May 1920.



Fire Insurance Plan of W.C. Edwards sawmill in New Edinburgh, 1901.



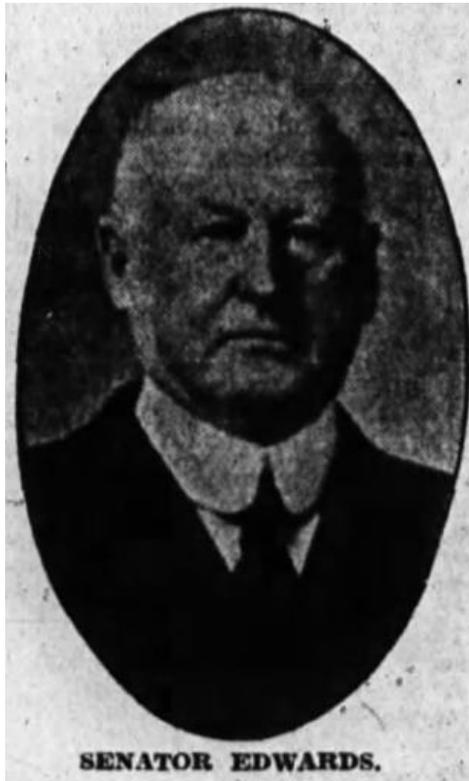
Aerial view of W.C. Edwards' former New Edinburgh sawmill, 1923. *Photo courtesy of Library and Archives Canada.*

In 1920, W.C. Edwards and Company and the Gilmour Hughson Lumber Company were purchased by the Riordon Pulp and Paper Company for \$60 million. The companies merged to form the Gatineau Company Limited.¹¹ At this time, W.C. Edwards sold the majority of their sawmills, with the exception of the wholesale branch on Somerset Street, which had begun operations in 1912.¹²

¹¹ "Ottawa Lumber Companies in Big \$60,000,000 Merger with Riordon's", *The Ottawa Journal*, 31 May 1920.

¹²"Court of Revision Announces Decisions in Many Appeals", *The Ottawa Journal*, 16 November 1911.

The company's namesake and founder, William Cameron Edwards, was a key figure in the early lumber industry, as well as a politician. In 1887, Edwards was the elected federal member of Parliament for Russell County, Ontario. In 1903, Edwards was appointed to the Senate of Canada by Sir Wilfrid Laurier.¹³ During his time in federal politics, Edwards became one of the founding directors of the Canadian Forestry Association. Edwards died in September 1921, shortly after he sold W.C. Edwards and Company and retired from his position as head of the company.¹⁴ After Edwards' death, operations of the company were taken over by Edwards' nephews: Gordon C. Edwards and Colonel Cameron MacPherson Edwards.



Portrait of W.C. Edwards, 1920. *The Ottawa Journal*.

¹³ "William Cameron Edwards 1844-1921", *Ontario Heritage Trust*.

¹⁴ "William Cameron Edwards 1844-1921", *Ontario Heritage Trust*.

At the time of W.C. Edward's sale to Riordon in 1920, the company's main offices were operating out of the Rideau Club Building, one of Ottawa's most exclusive private social clubs, at 82 Wellington Street. W.C. Edwards and Company used these offices from 1920 until 1925. Prior to this, their office was located on Edwards Street in Rockland, Ontario.¹⁵

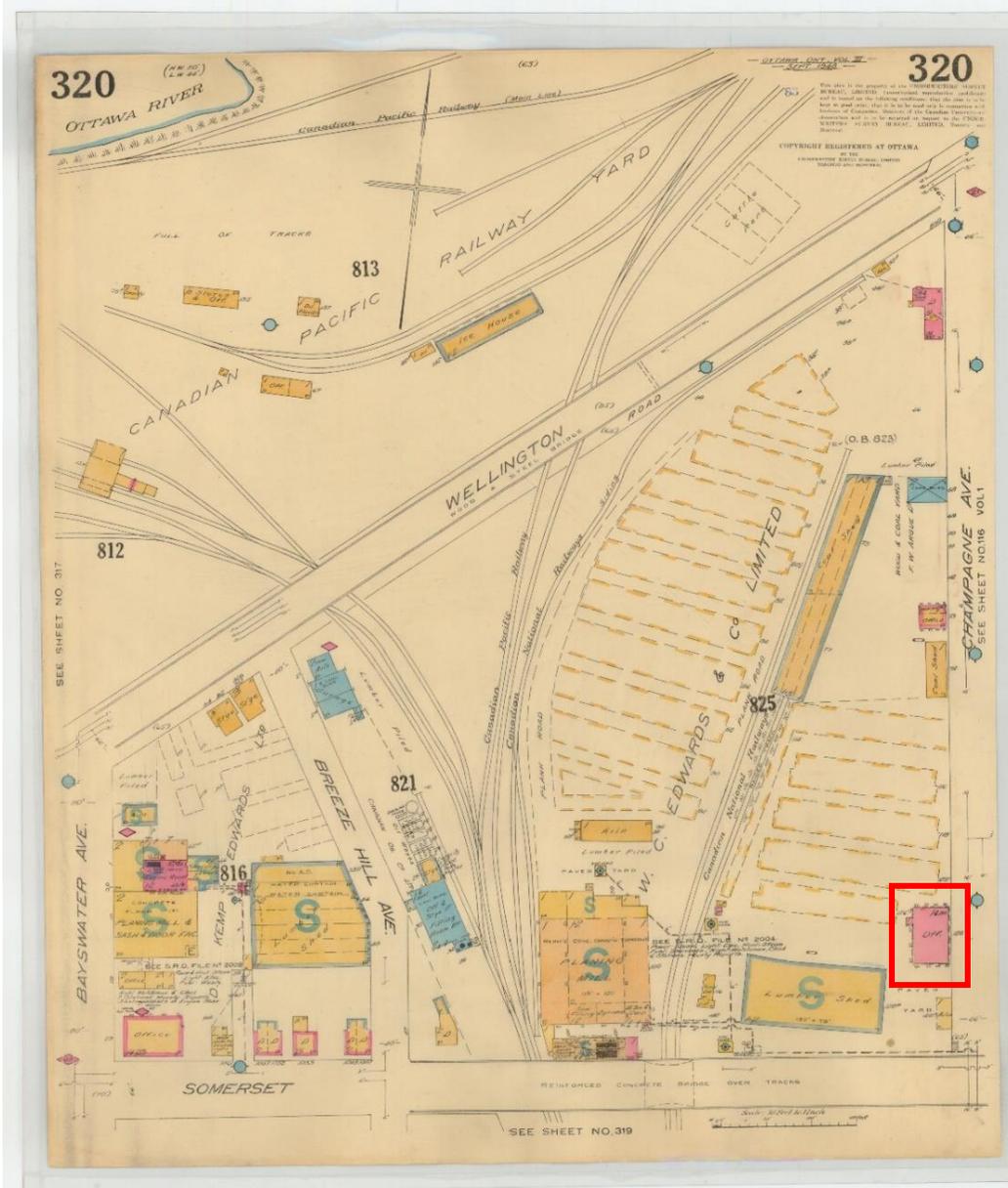
In 1925, the building at 290 City Centre was constructed as the main office for the W.C. Edwards and Company.¹⁶ W.C. Edwards and Company conducted business out of this building until 1962, at which point the land was purchased by developers Lawrence and Jarvis Freedman, known as the Freedman Brothers, and Edwards' operations moved to a sawmill in Davidson, Quebec.¹⁷

¹⁵ Annual Returns for W.C. Edwards Company, 1918-1931, Department of Secretary of State, *Library and Archives Canada*.

¹⁶ Ottawa City Directory, 1925.

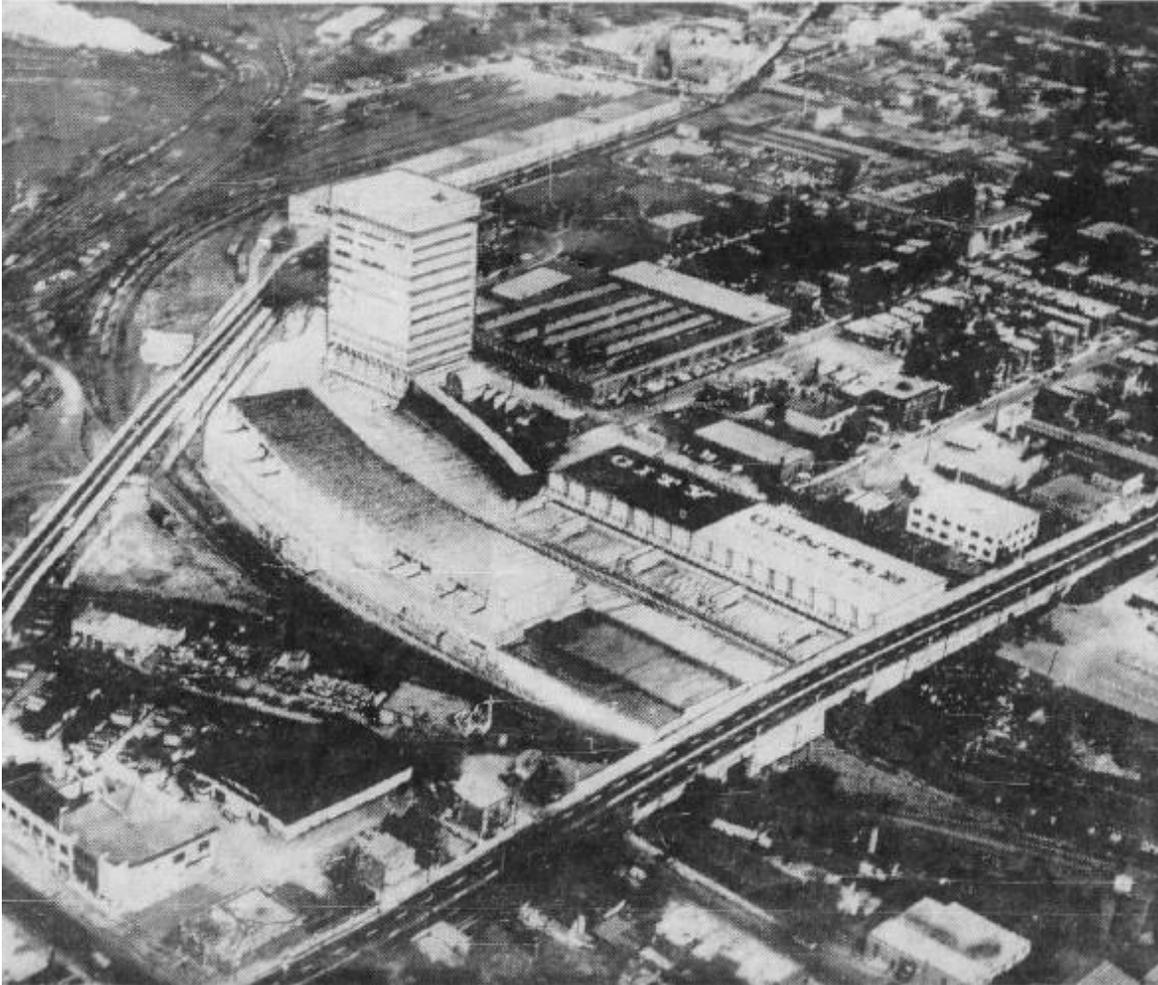
Annual Returns for W.C. Edwards Company, 1925-1926, Department of Secretary of State, *Library and Archives Canada*.

¹⁷ "Millions for Industrial Centre Near Bayswater," *Ottawa Citizen*, 1962.



First instance of 290 City Centre on the 1948 Fire Insurance Plan. This plan indicates that its address was 128 Champagne Avenue.

In 1962, the *Ottawa Citizen* shared the plans for the “City Centre Terminal,” which was bound by Somerset Street, Wellington Street (now Albert Street), the former CPR tracks, and Champagne Street (now City Centre Avenue). The development was meant to create warehouse spaces, offices, banks, and restaurants.



1962 Plan for the City Centre Complex, *The Ottawa Citizen*.

By 1966, the City Centre had changed from an industrial hub to a commercial development with the construction of the curved concrete building between Somerset Street and Scott Street.¹⁸ However, the 1962 plan for City Centre was never fully completed, and the building at 290 City Centre Ave remained. During the late twentieth century the building at 290 City Centre was used for various

¹⁸ “Twenty Four Companies Now in Half-Completed City Centre,” *The Ottawa Journal*, 21 January 1966.

commercial storefronts including a clothing store, a toy store, picture framing, and an appliance store.¹⁹



290 City Centre, 1990. *City of Ottawa.*

The building has been occupied by the Orange Art Gallery since 2014.

Surrounding Industries

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the site where the 290 City Centre building is located was previously occupied by J.R. Booth's Sparks Estate lumberyard.

J.R. Booth was one of North America's most prominent and well known lumber barons. As Booth's lumber operations grew in the late 19th century, he became interested in potential transportation networks to service his mills. In 1891, Booth formed a rail company called the Ottawa, Arnprior, and Parry Sound Railway and

¹⁹ Ottawa City Directories 1962-1991.

construction of his rail system began. In 1899, Booth's company was absorbed by the Canada Atlantic Railway.²⁰ As the Canada Atlantic Railway was designed to serve Booth's businesses, the 1901 Fire Insurance Plan depicts a railway line just west of Booth's lumber yard.

In 1905, the Canada Atlantic Railway became the Grand Trunk system and in 1923, it became part of the Canadian National Railway system.²¹ The Canadian National Railway tracks connected to the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had a roundhouse north of the location of W.C. Edwards Somerset Branch from 1883 until it was demolished in 1968.²²



Aerial view of CPR Roundhouse, c.1940. *City of Ottawa Archives.*

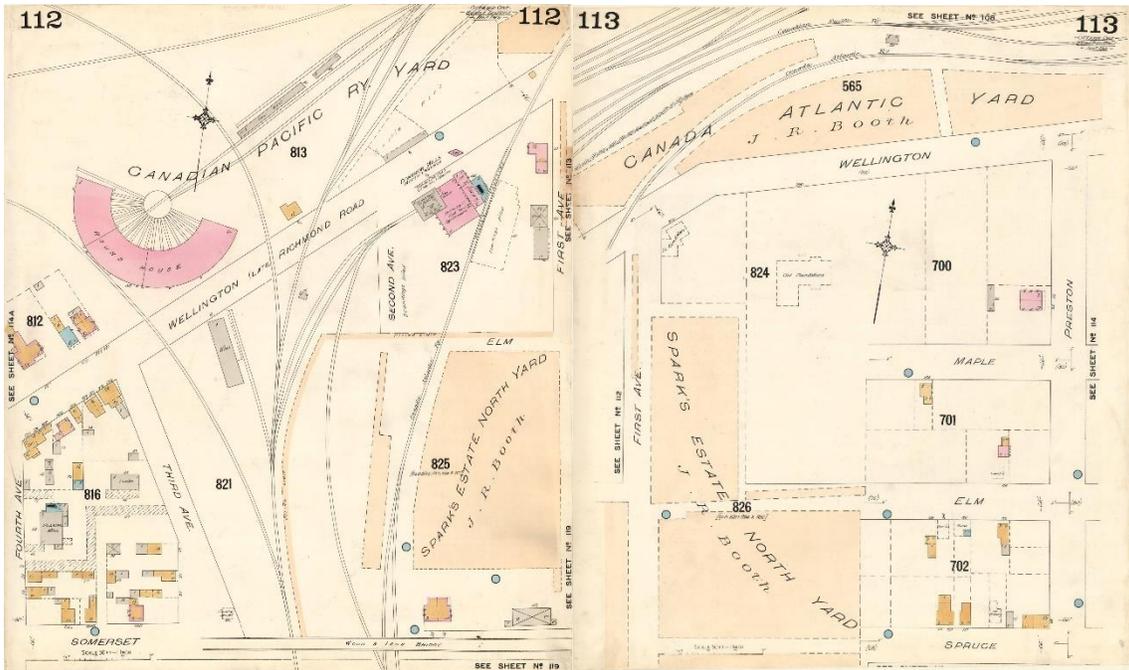
²⁰ "The Railway", *Glasgow Women's Institute Community History – Volume 3*, 1991.

²¹ "The Railway", *Glasgow Women's Institute Community History – Volume 3*, 1991.

²² "A window into the 1870s is unearthed," *Kitchissippi Times*, 2016.

Booth's establishment of his railway, and the presence of the Canadian Pacific Railway, made this location the ideal spot for railway-related industries like Edwards' lumberyard. Prior to 1912, George Mason's lumber yard was located in northwest corner of Somerset Street and Bayswater Avenue. By the 1920s, other notable industries had moved into this highly industrialized area close to the national railway tracks, including Argue Wood and Coal, O'Keefe Brewery, and Canadian Oil Company. All these industries were serviced by the surrounding railway.

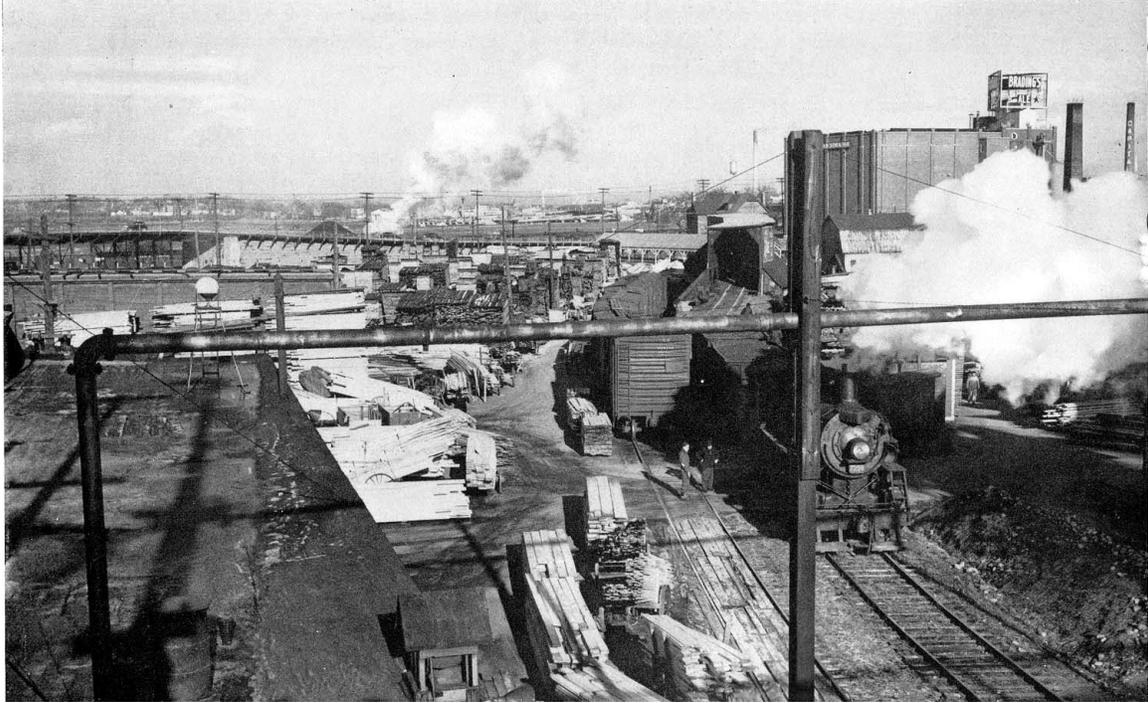
When the building at 290 City Centre was constructed, it sat in the middle of west Ottawa's industrial hub. With the removal of the railway tracks from the area in the early 1960s, the area around 290 City Centre was deindustrialized and commercialized. The building is historically linked to its surroundings as it is one of the last remaining buildings in the area that is directly connected to the area's railway era.



1901 Fire Insurance Plan for J.R. Booth's North Yard. Map includes Canadian Pacific Railway roundhouse in top left corner and the Canada Atlantic Railway tracks to the west of Booth's yard.



1922 Fire Insurance Plan showing the growth of industry around the railway.



View of W.C. Edwards lumberyards, G.W. Argue Coal, O'Keefe's Brewery from Somerset Bridge looking toward Wellington Street (now Scott Street), 1950.



View of railway tracks serving surrounding industries, facing Somerset Street, 1950.²³

²³ Above photos are from Jacques Gréber, *Plan for the National Capital General Report* (1950), page 85.

Context

290 City Centre is located in West Centretown near the border of Hintonburg. West Centretown is bound by the Ottawa River to the north, Carling Avenue to the south, Bronson Avenue to the east, and the O-Train Trillium line and Bayswater Avenue to the west.²⁴

The neighbourhoods in West Centretown, including LeBreton Flats, Little Italy, Chinatown, the Glebe Annex, and Chaudière and Victoria Islands, developed around LeBreton Flats as an industrial centre in the mid 1870s. Several sawmills, lumberyards, and railway yards defined the area and created working class neighbourhoods. The early development of Hintonburg, the neighbourhood adjacent to West Centretown, is also tied to the presence of these industries.²⁵

In the late twentieth century, these areas were deindustrialized and became spots for commercial, recreational, and residential developments. The City Centre complex is an example of a development on former industrial lands. While most of the buildings in the City Centre complex were built in the 1960s, the building at 290 City Centre is the one of the last buildings with ties to the site's industrial past. The building's use has changed from an industrial office to a commercial space, mirroring the neighbourhoods' evolution from a working-class neighbourhood to a central downtown neighbourhood.

²⁴ West Centretown Neighbourhood Heritage Statement, *The City of Ottawa*, 2017.

²⁵ Hintonburg - Mechanicsville Neighbourhood Heritage Statement, *The City of Ottawa*, 2017.



Aerial view of showing W.C. Edwards lumberyard, railway tracks, and various industries in the surrounding area, 1928. *GeoOttawa*.



Aerial view of City Centre development and surrounding area after the removal of most industrial operations, 1965. *GeoOttawa*.

The building at 290 City Centre is visible from the Somerset Street bridge, both by car and as a pedestrian. As it is highly visible and borders central neighbourhoods, it marks the transition from West Centretown to Hintonburg. The building is distinct in its surroundings as the only historic building on the City Centre site, making it a recognizable landmark to people who reside in both neighbourhoods, as well as people traveling through these neighbourhoods.



View of 290 City Centre from the south side of the Somerset Street Bridge.

Source: City of Ottawa



View of 290 City Centre and City Centre complex from the Somerset Bridge.

Source: City of Ottawa

Evaluation using Ontario Regulation 09/06

1	<p><i>The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method.</i></p> <p>The building is a representative example of a vernacular interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The architectural features of the building which are characteristic of this style include its wooden door with sidelites and semi-circular transom, its decorative gabled dormer with a curvilinear parapet above the central entrance, and its steeply pitched hipped roof with exposed wooden rafter tails.</p> <p>Its high style architecture is reflective of the importance associated with the company or industry at the time of its construction, and its form reflects its function as the administrative offices for an industrial company, illustrated through its high ceilings, ornate detailing, and fireproof safe.</p>	Yes
2	<p><i>The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.</i></p> <p>The Spanish Colonial Revival detailing is ornate, but the building's construction is simple and uses materials and forms characteristic of the era and region.</p>	No
3	<p><i>The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of technical or scientific merit.</i></p>	No

4	<p><i>The property has historical or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community.</i></p> <p>The building has direct associations with W.C. Edwards and Company, one of the largest early lumber establishments in eastern Ontario. The company was established in 1868 in Rockland, Ontario, and expanded into Ottawa in 1894 with the purchase of the sawmill at the Rideau Falls from the estate of James MacLaren. In 1912, the company established the Somerset Street sawmill on the land surrounding 290 City Centre Avenue.</p> <p>The W.C. Edwards and Company building was constructed as the company's administrative offices in 1925 and remained in use until the sawmill's closure in 1962.</p> <p>The company's namesake, William Cameron Edwards, was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 1903 by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and became one of the founding directors of the Canadian Forestry Association.</p> <p>The building has historical associations with the industrialization of the area, which grew with establishment of the Ottawa, Arnprior, and Parry Sound Railway and the presence of the Canadian Pacific Railway which acted as catalysts for the growth of railway dependent industries such as sawmills, lumberyards, and railway yards in the area.</p>	Yes
5	<p><i>The property has historical or associative value because it yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture.</i></p>	No

6	<p><i>The property has historical or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.</i></p>	No
7	<p><i>The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.</i></p> <p>The building is important in supporting the area's historic character that flourished as railway dependent industries and their associated residential neighborhoods were established in the early twentieth century.</p>	Yes
8	<p><i>The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings</i></p> <p>The building, as the administrative office for the industrial operations of W.C. Edwards and Company, is physically and visually linked to the railway, and historically linked to its supporting industrial uses.</p>	Yes
9	<p><i>The property has contextual value because it is a landmark.</i></p> <p>As one of the only remaining structures in West Centretown associated with the industrial rail era, the building is a landmark in the vicinity.</p>	Yes

SOURCES

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