

## Ontario Regulation 9/06 Assessment

217 Rideau Street

May 2024

Prepared by: Heritage Staff

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### Executive Summary

The building at 217 Rideau Street is a three-storey, stone-clad commercial building. The building was originally constructed circa 1876 and underwent façade alterations in the early to mid-twentieth century to reflect the Beaux-Arts architectural style. From 1884 until 1959, the George E. Preston tailor shop operated out of the building at 217 Rideau Street. The store's location on an early commercial main street with proximity to the Parliamentary Precinct contributed to its success as a prestigious and well-established tailoring firm in downtown Ottawa.

The building is part of a large grouping of early commercial buildings on Rideau Street, which together have functioned as a commercial corridor in Lowertown since their construction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today, the building continues to support retail and commercial activity on one of Ottawa's historic main streets.

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*.

**Criterion 1**

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.

**Yes**

**Response to Criterion**

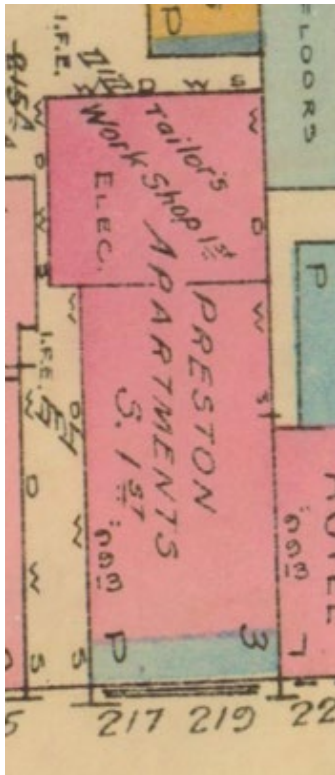
The building at 217 Rideau Street has design value as a unique example of the Beaux-Arts architectural style used for a commercial building. The original building was constructed circa 1876 and underwent façade alterations in the early to mid-twentieth century to reflect the Beaux-Arts architectural style. Popular in Canada during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Beaux-Arts style was often used for civic buildings like libraries, train stations, theatres, banks, and schools. The architectural features of the building which are characteristic of the Beaux-Arts style include its classical detailing, such as its shallow pilasters with decorative capitals, ornate spandrel panels, and a roofline featuring a parapet and balustrades.

**Supporting Details***Description of Building*

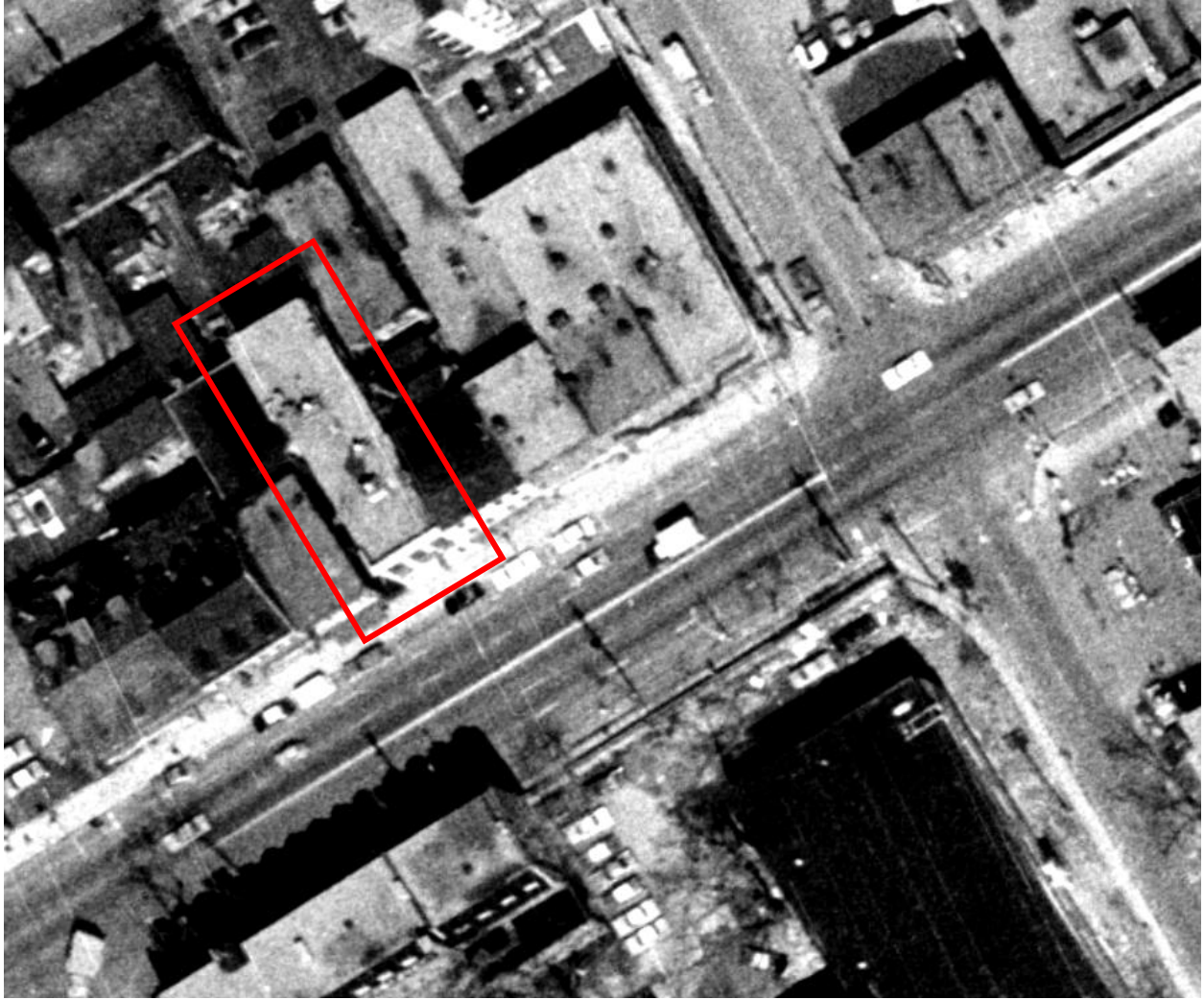
- The building at 217 Rideau Street is a stone-clad, three-storey commercial building constructed circa 1876 and underwent façade alterations in the early to mid-twentieth century to reflect the Beaux-Arts architectural style.
- The ground floor of the building has a recessed storefront with two entrances.
- Above the ground floor, the building features a symmetrical façade with three window bays. Within each window bay, the windows appear in groups of three.
- Each window bay is separated by pilasters extending from the bottom of the second storey windows to the top of the third storey windows. The pilasters are topped with stylized Corinthian capitals.
- In each window bay, the second and third storey windows are separated by decorative metal spandrel panels. Each spandrel panel features three octagonal medallions with floral and geometric motif.
- Above the third storey is an entablature with a dentilled cornice.
- Above the roofline, the building features a roofline trim consisting of two sections of balustrades separate by a decorative parapet.
- The building was occupied by the George E. Preston and Sons tailor shop from 1884 until 1959. The building at 217 Rideau Street was originally a two-and-a-half storey brick-clad building, with the tailor's storefront at the front of the building, and a workshop in the back. In the mid-twentieth century, the building was renovated to the three-storey and stone-façade that exists today.



217-219 Rideau Street on the 1912 Fire Insurance Plan, sheet 18.



217-219 Rideau Street on the 1948 Fire Insurance Plan, sheet 209, showing a stone façade, three-storays, and a tailor's workshop at the rear.



1965 aerial of the intersection of Rideau and Cumberland Streets, with 217 Rideau Street outlined in red. *GeoOttawa*, accessed April 2024.

## *Description of Architectural Style*

The building at 217 Rideau Street features elements of the Beaux-Art architectural style. The Beaux-Arts style is known for being “grand and theatrical, monumental and self-confident.”<sup>1</sup> As a classical style, it includes classical architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, pediments, and entablatures.

The building at 217 Rideau Street features elements of the Beaux-Arts style most notable through its stone-clad façade and its use of classical forms. The top two storeys of the building feature a symmetrical façade, which was often used in the Beaux-Arts style, with evenly spaced repetitive windows.<sup>2</sup> The building's classical detailing includes its shallow pilasters with decorative capitals, as well as its large entablature with a dentilled cornice. The building also features a flat roof, which is typical of Beaux-Arts style buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The building at 217 Rideau Street was occupied by a well-known and prominent tailor shop, George E. Preston & Sons. The use of the Beaux-Arts style in a retail setting is unique and was likely chosen to emulate a sense of grandiosity and prestige, as well as to reflect the business' success.

## *National and Local Context*

The Beaux-Arts style was taught and developed at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. Canadian and American architects who attended the École des Beaux-Arts brought the Beaux-Arts style to North America. In Canada, the Beaux-Arts style dominated in public and commercial buildings during the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the Beaux-Arts style in Canada was meant to evoke a sense of permanence and economic success in Canadian cities.<sup>5</sup> The style was often used in the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a movement which used urban planning and architecture to beautify and harmonize city centers.<sup>6</sup> In Ottawa, the rise of twentieth-century beautification projects in the downtown core led to the development of important buildings such as the Chateau Laurier and the Beaux-Arts style Union Station.<sup>7</sup> The Beaux-Arts style was also used in John A. Ewart's design of the A.J. Frieman department store.

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<sup>1</sup> Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucsker, “The Beaux-Arts Style,” *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles – Second Edition* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, “The Beaux-Arts Style,” *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles – Second Edition* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>3</sup> Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, “The Beaux-Arts Style,” *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles – Second Edition* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>4</sup> Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, “The Beaux-Arts Style,” *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles – Second Edition* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), 117.

<sup>5</sup> Shannon Ricketts, Leslie Maitland, and Jacqueline Hucker, “The Beaux-Arts Style,” *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles – Second Edition* (Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), 118.

<sup>6</sup> Edwinna von Baeyer, “City Beautiful Movement,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> “A Capital in the Making,” *National Capital Commission*, page 2.



Ottawa's former Union Station, *Credit: Library of Parliament.*



Rideau Street façade of 73 Rideau Street. *City of Ottawa, 2024.*

**Criterion 2**

The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.

**Yes**

**Response to Criterion**

The property at 217 Rideau Street has design value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship for a commercial building on Rideau Street. This is demonstrated through the building's elaborate use of stone and metal detailing in a commercial building. There are few examples of a commercial building with this level of craftsmanship on Rideau Street, making it unique on its streetscape.

**Supporting Details**

The property at 217 Rideau Street displays a high degree of craftsmanship for an early commercial Beaux-Arts building on Rideau Street.

The building uses ornate stone and metal detailing to achieve high artistry in a commercial building. A high degree of craftsmanship is exhibited through the artful metal spandrel panels between the second and third storey windows. The panels feature octagonal medallions with intricate floral and geometric motifs. The detailing of the metal paneling evokes the grandeur of Beaux-Arts style.

The building also displays craftsmanship through its use of classical detailing including intricate carved stone capitals, and the use of balustrades and a parapet above the building's roofline. There are few examples of a commercial building with this level of craftsmanship on Rideau Street, making it unique on its streetscape.





Detailing on 217 Rideau Street including a metal spandrel panel, ornate carved capitals, and dentilled cornice. *City of Ottawa*, 2024.



Balustrades and a parapet above the roofline at 217 Rideau Street. *Google Maps*, accessed 2024.

**Criterion 3**

The property has design value or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.

**No**

Heritage staff have reviewed the original plans and drawings for the subject building, compared the building to others of similar age or typology, and consulted relevant secondary sources including newspaper articles and architectural history books. Staff's review concluded that this property exemplifies typical construction methods for buildings of its type. The property does not meet this criterion.

<b>Criterion 4</b>	
The property has historical value or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community.	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Response to Criterion</b>	
<p>The property at 217 Rideau Street has historical value as it is directly associated with the George E. Preston and Sons tailor shop. The George E. Preston and Sons tailor shop was a well-known men’s tailor and suit retailer in Ottawa, established in 1870. The shop operated out of the building at 217 Rideau from 1884 until 1959. Throughout the business’ long history, it was frequently patronized by prime ministers and other notable politicians. The store’s location on an early commercial main street with proximity to the Parliamentary Precinct contributed to its success as a prestigious and well-established tailoring firm in downtown Ottawa.</p>	

### **Supporting Details**

The building at 217 Rideau Street has direct associations with the George E. Preston and Sons tailor shop. The George E. Preston and Sons was a prominent tailor shop and men’s clothing store in Ottawa that was established by George E. Preston in 1870.

George Preston immigrated to Canada in 1870 from Oxford, England. In the same year, he established his tailoring business on Sparks Street.<sup>8</sup> In 1874, George E. Preston and Sons moved to 231 Rideau Street until 1884, when the business moved into the building at 217 Rideau Street. During the shop’s 89-year history in Ottawa, the shop operated out of the building at 217 Rideau from 1884 until its closing in 1959.

Throughout its history, George E. Preston tailor shop supplied suits and tailoring services to prime ministers, from Sir John A. MacDonald to John Diefenbaker, and government officials.<sup>9</sup> The shop also specialized in military uniforms, with notable military customers including Air Marshal Billy Bishop, and Air Vice-Marshal Lawrence E. Wray.<sup>10</sup> The building’s location on a commercial main street with proximity to the Parliamentary Precinct, contributed to the success of the George E. Preston and Sons business.

The George E. Preston and Sons store were significant contributors to Ottawa’s community. They held a role in developing the tailoring field in Ottawa, as the store would frequently take on apprentices who would later open their own tailoring business in the city.<sup>11</sup> They also donate frequently to local events and fundraisers, including to the Ottawa Red Cross in the 1940s during the war effort.<sup>12</sup>

The business’ longevity can be attributed to the generational involvement in the store. When George E. Preston’s died in January 1921, his sons John T. and William J.

<sup>8</sup> 1870-71 Ottawa City Directory.


<sup>9</sup> “Montreal Firm Buys Preston’s,” *The Ottawa Journal*, September 30, 1959.

<sup>10</sup> “Tailor to the PMs,” *The Ottawa Journal*, August 2, 1958.

<sup>11</sup> “Ottawa’s Famous Tailor: The Legacy of George E. Preston and Sons,” *Hidden Histories*, accessed April 2024.

<sup>12</sup> “To Extend Red Cross Drive,” *The Ottawa Journal*, May 20, 1942.

Preston took over the business.<sup>13</sup> After John T. Preston died in 1931 and William J. Preston in 1959, the business was sold Montreal tailoring chain, Scott Clothing Company.<sup>14</sup> In 1960, the Del Rio Restaurant moved into the building at 217 Rideau Street. The ground floor of the building continues to operate as a restaurant today.



Learn the True  
Economy of  
Preston Tailored  
Clothes

FOUNDED 1870  
**PRESTONS**  
GEO. E. PRESTON & SONS LIMITED  
Civil and Military Tailors  
217 Rideau St. Rid. 2152

*The Ottawa Citizen*, February 13, 1932.

Quality and  
Workmanship Tell

There is a definite air of distinction about the suit that has been tailored to measure, cut from an exclusive fabric, accurately fit, beautifully hand-needed.

*Civil and Clerical Tailors*

FOUNDED 1870  
**PRESTONS**  
GEO. E. PRESTON & SONS LIMITED  
Civil and Military Tailors.  
217 Rideau St. Rideau 2152:

*The Ottawa Citizen*, September 26, 1931.

<sup>13</sup> "Mr. George Preston Died This Afternoon," *The Ottawa Journal*, January 19, 1921.

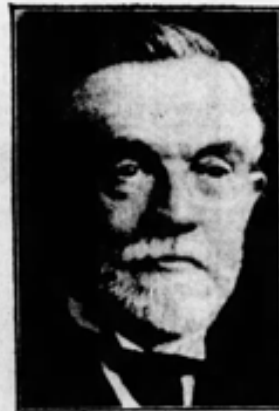
<sup>14</sup> "Montreal Firm Buys Preston's," *The Ottawa Journal*, September 30, 1959.

WE HAVE SERVED GENERATIONS OF  
**TAILORED MEN**

1870 the late Mr. George E. Preston founded the business that has withstood the march of time for three generations progressing and developing, until today it is one of the largest merchant tailoring establishments in Canada.



*The present Preston establishment  
at 217 Rideau Street.*



*The late Geo. E. Preston  
Founder of the Business.*



From the inception of the business, they have catered to the gentlemen who demand a quiet dignity in their clothes—as well as the modern touch of individuality and smartness.

Highest quality British woollens, meticulous workmanship, superior styling and fit have made clothes tailored by the Prestons the distinguishing trait of Ottawa's professional and business executives, as well as the most widely known among our parliamentarians.

• LARGEST STOCK OF BRITISH WOOLLENS IN CANADA

**GEO. E. PRESTON & SONS**  
LIMITED

**FOUNDED 1870**

Phone 4-3196

217 Rideau Street

<b>Criterion 5</b>	
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.	<b>No</b>
Based on research conducted by Heritage Staff, the property does not yield information that contributes to the understanding of a community or culture. The property does not meet this criterion.	

<b>Criterion 6</b>	
The property has historical value 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.	<b>No</b>
Research conducted did not reveal that this property is representative of the work of a known or significant architect, builder, designer or theorist. The property does not meet this criterion.	

<b>Criterion 7</b>	
The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.	<b>Yes</b>
217 Rideau Street has contextual value as it is important in supporting and maintaining the character of Rideau Street— which has functioned as a commercial main street in Ottawa since the nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth century, most of Rideau Street between Sussex Drive and Cumberland Street was occupied by commercial spaces. Today, the building at 217 Rideau Street continues to reflect Rideau Street’s history as a commercial main street in Ottawa.	

***Supporting Details – Criterion 7***

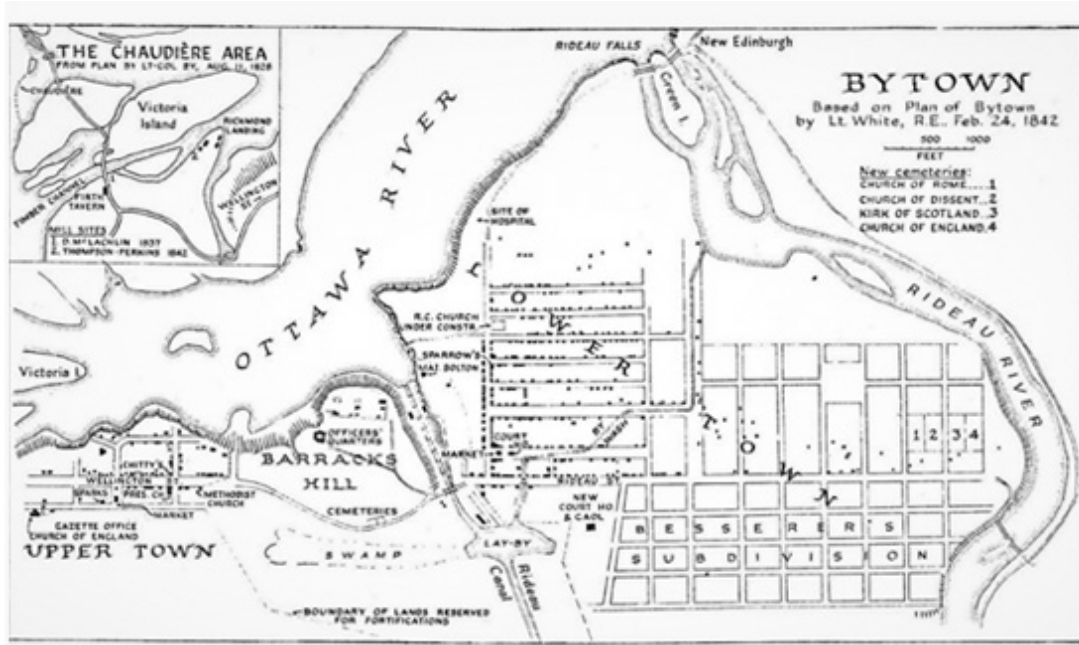
The building at 217 Rideau Street has functioned as a mixed-use building with commercial space on the first storey since its construction circa 1876. The building is important in maintaining, and supporting the character of Rideau Street—which has functioned as a commercial main street in Ottawa’s Lowertown core since the 19th century.

***History of Lowertown***

Rideau Street is located in Lowertown, on the edge of the ByWard Market, in Ottawa’s downtown core. The ByWard Market and Lowertown are two of the earliest settlement areas in the city. Together, they are bounded by the Rideau Canal and Sussex Drive to the west, the Rideau Street commercial corridor to the south, also encompassing the Rideau Centre to Mackenzie King Bridge, and finally the Rideau River, meandering from the Ottawa River, collectively acting as both the eastern and northern boundary of the neighbourhood.

In 1826, lead by Colonel By and Thomas McKay, the entrance of the Rideau Canal was determined, and as such, the birth of Bytown. The street grid in the ByWard and

Lowertown areas derives from the distribution of land in 1827 when Colonel John By laid out Bytown. Bytown was originally comprised of and divided into Lower Town and Upper Town. Upper Town was predominately occupied by English Protestants, many who worked as officers for the military, whereas Lower Town became home for many tradesman and canal workers.



Map of Bytown, 1842, showing historic Lower Town and Upper Town. *The Historical Society of Ottawa*, accessed 2023.

A critical aspect of the economic and industrial development of both the ByWard and Lowertown neighbourhoods was the opening of the Rideau Canal in 1832. The Rideau Canal was constructed between 1826 and 1832 as part of a military strategy to establish an alternative route to the St. Lawrence River transportation corridor. Although built with the intent to protect Canada from American invasion, military control was relinquished as the threat subsided and the canal became predominately used for transportation of civilians, commercial goods, and natural resources; thereby increasing trade and spurring economic growth, and subsequently leading to the development of the area.

The construction of the railway through Ottawa's downtown core in 1854, and the expansions of Ottawa after the city was chosen as the national capital in 1857, also contributed to development. The construction of the Parliament Buildings just west of Sussex Drive in the 1860s resulted in an influx of public servants in the area, which gave way to the rise of commerce in the area specifically on Rideau Street and in the ByWard Market. Lowertown was an arrival point for many cultural groups including Irish, French Canadians and Ottawa's earliest Jewish community. Many of these new arrivals worked on the construction of the canal, while the Jewish community became

prominent local shopkeepers, running businesses relating to food, clothing, second-hand goods, shoe repair, tailors, etc.

### *History of Rideau Street as a Commercial Main Street*

Originally established as a corduroy road by Colonel John By in 1827, Rideau Street was the main route from Ottawa to Montreal.<sup>15</sup> Rideau Street was originally intended to be a residential street due to its large lanes and lots. While Rideau Street east of King Edward Street remained a primarily residential street well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the west end of Rideau Street became a busy commercial street due to its proximity to transportation, services, the ByWard Market, and Parliament Hill.<sup>16</sup>

Further facilitating Lowertown's expansion was the construction of Ottawa's first large hospital, The Carleton Protestant General Hospital (now Wallis House, 589 Rideau Street), at the east end of Rideau Street in 1875.<sup>17</sup> The 1891 construction of streetcar lines along Dalhousie, Rideau, and George Streets as well as Sussex Drive also greatly contributed to the expansion of residential and commercial development in the area, which was becoming home to an increasing number of public servants and the middle class. The rise of the middle class in Lowertown contributed to the success of large commercial stores on Rideau Street.

Since its construction circa 1876, the building at 217 Rideau Street has functioned as a commercial space on a historical main street. The top floors of the building were used as office space and apartments. The building's consistent use as a commercial and mixed-use space makes it an essential component of Rideau Street as a commercial main street.

Today, the first storey of 217 Rideau Street continues to be used as a commercial space. The building at 217 Rideau Street maintains and supports the character of Rideau Street as a historic and current commercial main street.

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<sup>15</sup> City of Ottawa Planning and Growth Management. "Uptown Rideau Street Community Design Plan," *City of Ottawa*, 2015, page 26.

<sup>16</sup> City of Ottawa Planning and Growth Management. "Uptown Rideau Street Community Design Plan," *City of Ottawa*, 2015, page 26.

<sup>17</sup> City of Ottawa Planning and Growth Management. "Uptown Rideau Street Community Design Plan," *City of Ottawa*, 2015, page 26.





Sussex Drive and Rideau Street, 1875.

Credit: Topley Studio Fonds/Library and Archives Canada/PA-012527



Storefronts on Rideau Street, 1878.

Credit: William James Topley/Library and Archives Canada/PA-027441

<b>Criterion 8</b>	
The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.	<b>Yes</b>
The building at 217 Rideau Street is historically, functionally, and visually linked to the surrounding commercial area. This building, together with others nearby, such as 198 Rideau Street, have historically functioned as part of a commercial corridor on a main street in Lowertown since their construction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These buildings are visually linked to each other in terms of form, massing, cladding, and type, with common features such as flat roofs, brick facades, and commercial space at grade. Today, the building continues to support retail and commercial activity on one of Ottawa's historic main streets.	

**Supporting Details – Criterion 8**

Today, Rideau Street continues to function as an important main commercial street in downtown Ottawa, with the Rideau Centre sitting at the heart of Lowertown. The Rideau Centre, which has frontage on Rideau Street, is a modern commercial landmark in Ottawa and is integrated into the historic commercial streetscape of Rideau Street. The building at 217 Rideau Street has consistently functioned as a commercial space within a hub of commercial activity in Lowertown. Thus, the property is functionally and historically linked to its surroundings.

From Sussex Drive to Cumberland Street, both the north and south sides of Rideau Street are characterized by the presence of commercial spaces. The building at 217 Rideau Street is part of a large grouping of remaining early commercial buildings on Rideau Street.

Some of the earliest commercial buildings on Rideau Street are situated on the block between Sussex Drive and Dalhousie Street. These properties include the Featherstone Building at 103-105 Rideau Street, constructed in 1869, which originally operated as a drugstore; 101 Rideau Street, constructed in 1871, originally used as a bookstore and later a dry goods store; and The Atwood building at 97-99 Rideau Street, constructed in 1908, originally an apartment building.<sup>18</sup> All of these properties are designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

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<sup>18</sup> "The Atwood, 101 Rideau Street, and The Featherstone Building," *Heritage Ottawa*.



Facades of 97-99, 101, and 103-105 Rideau Street. *Heritage Ottawa*, accessed 2023.

Throughout the twentieth century, most of the block of Rideau Street between Sussex and Mosgrove Streets was occupied by large commercial spaces. In 1914, McKerracher-Wanless Limited, a large menswear store, opened at 41 Rideau Street in the Plaza Building on the northeast corner of Rideau Street and Sussex Drive. In 1945, the store became Henry "Macks" Limited, also a menswear store, before it moved to 151 Rideau Street in 1967. In 1949, the Woolworth's Department Store opened at 47 Rideau Street between the Macks in the Plaza Building and Freiman's at 73 Rideau Street. The Freiman's department store existed at 73 Rideau Street in some capacity from 1902 to 1974. The building at 73 Rideau Street has been the Hudson's Bay Company since 1974 and was integrated into the Rideau Centre in the 1980s.



41, 47, and 73 Rideau Street in 1957. Copyright: Andrew Newton Photographers Limited, *City of Ottawa Archives*, MG393-NP-48822-001, Item CA043955.

Other notable department stores on Rideau Street include The Charles Ogilvy Limited Department Store, which opened in 1907 on the south side of Rideau Street at the corner of Rideau and Nicholas Streets. Its façade is incorporated into the Rideau Centre today.<sup>19</sup> In 1922, the J.A. Larocque Department Store opened at 169 Rideau, and is now called Mercury Court.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Charles Ogilvy Limited Department Store," *Heritage Ottawa*, accessed January 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Vineberg, "Remembering "The Store": a brief history of Larocque's Department Store," *Lowertown Echo de la Basse-ville*, November 5, 2020. Accessed December 2023.



Rideau Street and Nicholas Street, looking west and showing streetcars and Ogilvy's department store.  
Credit: Topley Studio Fonds/Library and Archives Canada/PA-012905.

The building at 217 Rideau Street is situated on the north side of Rideau Street, just west of the intersection of Rideau and Cumberland Streets. The building shares a block with 198 Rideau Street, which has operated as a commercial building since its construction in circa 1885.

Just west of the intersection of Rideau and Dalhousie Streets, there are other historic storefronts, including 149, 152, and 156-158 Rideau Street, which have all operated as a commercial building since their construction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as 155 Rideau Street, known as the Clegg-Feller Building, which is one of the oldest examples of commercial architecture in Ottawa and is designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.<sup>21</sup> These buildings are visually linked with each other due to their similar stylings featuring a two- to three-storey massing, brick-cladding, flat roofs, and ground level storefront with mixed-use space above. Today, each of these building's main storeys continues to function as a commercial space and supports retail and commercial activity on one of Ottawa's historic main streets.

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<sup>21</sup> "Clegg-Feller Building|Windsor Smoke Shop," *Heritage Ottawa*, accessed March 2024.



217 Rideau Street, *City of Ottawa*, 2024.

**Criterion 9**

The property has contextual value because it is a landmark

**No**

The property is not considered a landmark on Rideau Street, nor is it commonly referenced for the purposes of wayfinding.

## Sources

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