

Ontario Regulation 9/06 Assessment

Address: 251 Besserer Street

Date:

Prepared By:



Source: Google Maps, 2019

Executive Summary

251 Besserer Street is a two-storey red brick building with a raised basement, located at the corner of Besserer Street and King Edward Avenue. Built in the Beaux-Arts style, the building features a symmetrical façade with seven bays of windows. The property is located within the Sandy Hill neighbourhood of Ottawa.

Purpose built in 1912, 251 Besserer Street served as the Rideau Exchange, the second Bell Telephone Company switchboard operated exchange in Ottawa providing services to Lowertown until the 1940s. The building housed J.G. Whyte & Sons Ltd. From 1948 until circa 1980. Today, the property is owned by the Chinese Embassy of Ottawa.

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 property located at 251 Besserer Street has design value as a representative example of the Beaux Arts architectural style, an expressive style evoking grandeur, stability and permanence, often featuring classical elements, and most commonly applied to turn of the century buildings. The former Rideau Exchange building is a symmetrical red brick building with stone details composed of seven bays with a raised basement. Typical of the style, it features classical details including its large cornice, pilasters, decorative brickwork, and central entrance with portico.	

Supporting Details – Criterion 1

Description of Building

251 Besserer Street is a two-storey red brick building with a raised basement and a symmetrical façade with seven bays of windows. The building, constructed in 1912, is a representative example of the Beaux Arts architectural style, an expressive style evoking grandeur, stability and permanence, often featuring classical elements, and most commonly applied to turn of the century buildings. The property is a corner lot with a driveway, a fence and parking lot at rear.

The central entrance features double metal front doors with a large square window divided into several lites and framed by decorative metal. A stone entablature including volutes and a pediment surround the entrance. The main brick body of the building divided into bays by two-storey brick pilasters. The building also displays decorative brickwork between the first and second storey, stone lintels and banding over windows, string courses, stone roundels, a heavy cornice and one brick chimney. The building’s twin, the Carling Exchange, built in 1913, is located at 200 First Avenue.



Front elevation facing Besserer Street. Google Maps, 2019.



Side elevation facing King Edward Avenue. Google Maps, 2019.



Back elevation facing West. Google Maps, 2019.

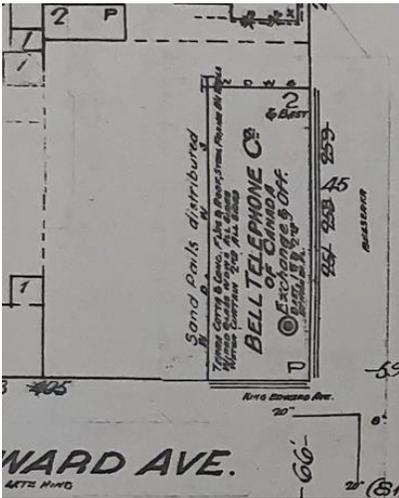


Side elevation facing East. Google Maps, 2019

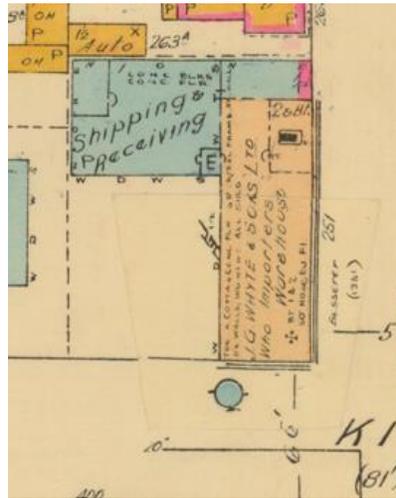
During its use as the Rideau Exchange for the Bell Telephone Company, the basement of the building housed large storage batteries, the first floor contained cable runways, two 28 horsepower generators for charging the storage batteries and two smaller machines for generating alternating current for ringing, and the second floor was a big airy room used as the operating room, containing the switchboards and chief operator's desk¹.

Alterations and Additions

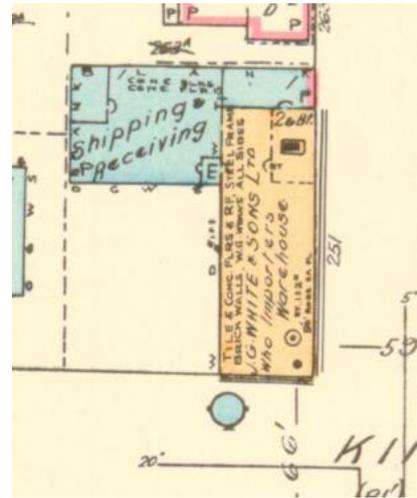
251 Besserer Street underwent several alterations to serve new functions. The 1948 Fire Insurance Plan shows a stone addition to the east side which served as a shipping and receiving garage for building owners J. G. Whyte & Sons Ltd.



1922 Fire Insurance Plan



1948 Fire Insurance Plan



1963-1965 Fire Insurance Plan



1933 Aerial Photo

¹ Ottawa Citizen, 1912

In 1988, the City of Ottawa presented the owner, Pierre Bourque et Fils Ltee., with an Ottawa Architectural Conservation Award, recognizing their efforts to revitalize the property. The Bourques hired Brisbin Brook Beynon Architects for the \$1-million adaptive reuse project. A rear addition was built along with new exit stairs, an elevator and office space². The project was praised in several newspapers, as the architects were careful to conserve the existing building and distinguish it from the new addition through subtle considerations. While the design for the addition was visually similar to the existing structure, stone was used instead of brick for the base floor, matching in colour and texture to the existing limestone. The cornice at the top of the new addition offers continuation of the existing heavy copper cornice instead of distraction from it³.



Maison Bourque's well-designed rear addition makes a striking facade

The Ottawa Citizen, July 1988.

401 KING EDWARD AVENUE
"AN AWARD WINNING RENOVATION"

- . 1,800 SQ. FT. ON GROUND FLOOR
- . 2,000 SQ. FT. ON SECOND FLOOR
- . IMMEDIATE OCCUPANCY
- . EXCELLENT EXPOSURE
- . TREMENDOUS NATURAL LIGHT
- . OVER 15 FT. FLOOR TO CEILING
- . ON-SITE PARKING

236-9613
 BOURQUE, PIERRE & SONS

4292 56-8

The Ottawa Citizen, June 1989

Description of Architectural Style

251 Besserer Street is a building which evokes grandeur, stability and permanence through its wide massing, symmetrical façade, and central entrance. However, its stylistic elements are understated. Including its careful alterations completed for the building's evolving uses, 251 Besserer Street is representative of a turn of the century Beaux-Arts style office building.

² The Ottawa Citizen, November 1988

³ The Ottawa Citizen, July 1988

The Beaux-Arts style, developed in the last decades of the 19th century at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris is known for being grand, eclectic and dramatic.⁴ The Beaux-Arts style is eclectic, incorporating classical, and less commonly, renaissance and baroque elements.⁵ Buildings of the Beaux-Arts style display balance and symmetry, and modern materials such as iron and glass.⁶ The property displays classical elements including an entranceway with a pediment and brackets with ionic scroll design, pilasters of the doric order distinguishing each bay of the façade, and heavy cornices.



Entranceway with stone entablature, ionic brackets and pediment



Pilasters on façade spanning two storeys

⁴ Ontario Architecture. (n.d.) Beaux Arts (1885-1945). <http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/Beauxarts.htm>

⁵ Heritage Wilmot. (2022). Wilmot Township Architectural Guide. https://www.wilmot.ca/en/living-here/resources/Heritage-Wilmot/Wilmot-Architecture-Master-Document_FINAL_June-6-2022.pdf; Ontario Heritage Trust. (n.d.) Architectural Style. <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/places-of-worship/places-of-worship-database/architecture/architectural-style>

⁶ Ibid.



Stone cornice and roundels lining the top of the building



Decorative brickwork on building facade

Local and National Context

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 century⁷.

The use of the Beaux-Arts style in Canada was meant to evoke a sense of permanence and economic success in Canadian cities⁸. 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 centers⁹. The predominant use of Beaux-Arts architecture in Ontario was for civic buildings.¹⁰ 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 Station¹¹.

⁷ Thomas, C. (2006). Canadian Architecture: 1867-1914. The Canadian Encyclopedia.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ontario Heritage Trust. (n.d.) Architectural Style. <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/places-of-worship/places-of-worship-database/architecture/architectural-style>

¹¹ Powell, J. (n.d.) Ottawa the Beautiful: The Gréber Report. The Historical Society of Ottawa. <https://www.historicalocietyottawa.ca/publications/ottawa-stories/changes-in-the-city-s-landscape/ottawa-the-beautiful-the-greber-report>



Ottawa's former Union Station, an exuberant expression of the Beaux Arts style. Library of Parliament. Constructed 1912.



200 First Avenue, historically known as the Carling Exchange, is the architectural twin of 251 Besserer Street. Constructed in 1913.



Ottawa's Carnegie Library, demolished. Constructed in 1906.



New Hamburg Branch of the Region of Waterloo Library. 145 Huron Street. Constructed in 1915.



Bank of Montreal building in Norwich, Ontario. Built in 1916.

Criterion 2	
The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.	No
Response to Criterion	
The property displays a moderate degree of craftsmanship typically visible on commercial buildings designed in the building's architectural style. The property does not meet this criterion.	

Criterion 3	
The property has design value or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.	No
Response to Criterion	
Heritage staff have 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.	

Criterion 4	
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.	Yes
<p>Response to Criterion</p> <p>The former Rideau Exchange has historical value for its direct associations with the Bell Telephone Company and the themes of development of telecommunications in Ottawa and women in the Canadian workforce. Purpose-built in 1912 as the second Bell Telephone Company switchboard exchange in Ottawa, the Rideau Exchange provided telephone services to the surrounding area until the 1940s. The property symbolizes a time of growth, technological advancement, and increased wealth in Ottawa. The former Rideau Exchange building sheds light on the history of women in the Canadian workforce. The Bell Telephone Company was established in 1877 and the first telephone exchange in Canada was built in 1878 in Hamilton, Ontario. By the year 1900, Bell exclusively hired women to work as switchboard operators, a position that demanded a high degree of patience, quick thinking and physical exertion. The property shines a light on the important history of women in the Canadian workforce. The building with longstanding Ottawa consumer goods store, J.G. Whyte & Sons. Founded in 1855, the store was first located on Rideau Street and was located at 251 Besserer Street from 1948 until 1980. The business continued to operate until 2020.</p>	

Supporting Details – Criterion 4

251 Besserer Street was purpose-built in 1912 as the Rideau Exchange for the Bell Telephone Company, providing telephone services to Lowertown. The Rideau Exchange was the second exchange building in Ottawa at the time, with the Queen Exchange (60 Queen Street) simultaneously provided services to Uppertown. As the Queen Exchange building no longer exists, 251 Besserer Street is the oldest standing building in Ottawa which once served as a telephone exchange. While the Queen Exchange introduced Ottawa to telephone technology, the establishment of the Rideau Exchange was due to the increased demand for telephone, and signifies increased wealth and population, and openness to new technology in Ottawa. Two more telephone exchanges were built in Ottawa: The Carling Exchange built in 1913 on 200 First Avenue and the Sherwood Exchange built in 1919 on 43 Eccles Street. All four exchanges ended operations in the early 1940s as Ottawa shifted to dial-in technology.



Source: Topley Collection. August, 1912. Library and Archives Canada. 3429114. PA-042777.

The Bell Telephone Company of Canada was established in 1877, after Alexander Graham Bell received a patent for the Bell telephone on March 7, 1876¹². Bell transferred 75% of the patent rights to his father, Melville, who established the company in Canada. The first commercial telephone exchange was built in New Haven, Connecticut in 1878¹³. In 1879, Melville Bell sold the patent rights to William H. Forbes and his associates at the National Bell Telephone Company of Boston and joined his son in his work in Boston¹⁴. On April 29, 1880, The Bell Telephone Company of Canada received the rights to construct telephone lines across Canada¹⁵. Today, the Canadian company is known as Bell Canada, while the American National Bell Telephone

¹² BCE, n.d.

¹³ Harvard, n.d.

¹⁴ BCE, n.d.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Company evolved into The American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T)¹⁶. The predecessor to telephones was the use of telegraphs, which was invented by Samuel Morse in 1837.

The first telephone exchange in Canada, often referred to as the first telephone exchange in the British Empire, was established in Hamilton, Ontario in 1878¹⁷.

In major Canadian cities, two competing companies provided telephone service: The Dominion Telegraph Company and the Montreal Telegraph Company¹⁸. Telephone subscribers of one company were unable to make or receive calls from subscribers of the other company. The first telephone exchange in Ottawa was established in January 1880 by the Dominion Telegraph Company under the management of Warren Soper¹⁹. Shortly after, the Montreal Telegraph Company established its exchange with local agent Thomas Ahearn.

Ahearn and Soper were both influential figures in Ottawa's history. Along with telephones, they were responsible for providing Ottawa with electric light and the streetcar system²⁰.

Later in the same year, the Bell Telephone Company of Canada bought out both the Dominion Telegraph Company and Montreal Telegraph Company in June and November, respectively, and set up the Queen Exchange on 60 Queen Street with Ahearn continuing as manager until 1895²¹. Ahearn later became a director of the Bell Telephone Company²².

¹⁶ Harvard, n.d.

¹⁷ The Hamilton Spectator, 2016; Plaque, 8 Main Street East, Hamilton, Ontario.

¹⁸ The Ottawa Citizen, 1939.

¹⁹ Vlasveld, 2020

²⁰ Powell, 1892.

²¹ The Ottawa Citizen, 1939.

²² Ibid.

A
NEW ISSUE
OF THE
Telephone Directory

for Eastern Ontario, including Ottawa and Hull, is now being prepared, and will soon be distributed.

Owing to the opening of the new "Rideau" exchange, a great many changes are necessary in this issue, so that subscribers requiring any changes in their entry should report it at once.

If you are not a subscriber, now is the time to place your order so that your name may appear in the new book.

THE BELL TELEPHONE CO. OF CANADA
J. E. MACPHERSON, - District Superintendent.



J. E. Macpherson was manager of Bell in Ottawa for 20 years (The Ottawa Journal, 1939). Macpherson was appointed to Executive Assistant in 1923, and then promoted to Vice President of Bell Canada in 1925. Image from The Ottawa Journal, 1912.

Exchanges were locations where switchboards were operated to connect callers. Power for the telephones was provided from the exchange, called "central energy" or "common battery"²³. A telephone subscriber who needed to speak with another subscriber would pick up the phone which would connect immediately to the switchboard, indicated by a glowing light, and hear the operator ask "Number, please?". The operator would then connect the call by plugging the ringing cable into the relevant jack on their switchboard. If the number belonged to another region, the operator would transfer the call to the correct exchange where another operator would connect the caller.

In the year 1921, Bell Telephone hosted 'telephone week' at the four exchanges in Ottawa, which allowed the general public to visit the exchanges and learn about how calls are made. The success of the event in 1921 led to more telephone weeks in upcoming years.

²³ Hicken, 2024

TELEPHONE WEEK
An Invitation to the Public

WE are making the week of November 14th to 19th a Special Telephone Week.

On behalf of the local staff, we cordially invite you to visit any of our exchanges any afternoon or evening during that week, in order that we may show you something of the world that lies behind your telephone.

You will be heartily welcome and we believe will find the actual operation of the switchboard, and an explanation of the handling of telephone calls, of genuine interest.

LOCATION OF EXCHANGES:

QUEEN EXCHANGE—80 Queen Street.
 CARLING EXCHANGE—First Avenue, just west of Bank.
 RIDEAU EXCHANGE—Bessmer Street, corner King Edward Avenue.
 SHERWOOD EXCHANGE—Eccles Street, between LeBreton and Booth.

Hours: 2.30 p.m.—5.30 p.m.
 7.30 p.m.—9.30 p.m.

THE BELL TELEPHONE CO.
 OF CANADA



The Ottawa Journal, November 1921.



The Ottawa Journal, May 1939.

Women's History

The Bell Telephone Company was established in 1877, and by the year 1900, all telephone operators hired at exchange buildings were women²⁴. The decision to hire only women emerged from an experiment done in 1888 which found that men were “seldom polite and submissive to irate or rude subscribers but ‘matched insult for insult’.”²⁵. However, the wage rates for women operators were also lower than for men. Furthermore, to qualify, women had to be physically fit, at least a certain height, and had to prove good hearing and eyesight²⁶. Women who wore eyeglasses, were unhealthy, and lacked the skills of “enunciation, education and penmanship” were dismissed, which disqualified many immigrants and women without formal education²⁷. However, the Royal Commission revealed that even with these specifications, the operators’ working conditions did not necessarily reflect a higher class or result in higher wages, and instead resembled blue collar work. Although operators conducted important and demanding work, the starting salary was \$18 a month, increasing to \$25 after three years of service. Comparatively, the average rate of skilled women in the industry was \$30 a month, and for men, it was \$40 - \$60²⁸.

²⁴ Sangster, 1978

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Whenever there is a village fire, when tragedy strikes, or if a national calamity occurs, you can bet your last buck that the unsung heroine of it all will probably be the Bell Telephone operator.

The Ottawa Citizen, 1959



Ottawa Long-Distance Switchboard Operators, Bell Telephone Co. Chris Lund, December 1961. Library and Archives Canada.

As the number of telephone subscribers grew, technology had to adapt to the increase in lines and frequency of calls. Operators became overwhelmed by the volume of calls and callers formed queues.

Ottawa shifted to dial in technology in the early 1940s. The switchboard operated exchanges were no longer in use. Instead, dial in exchanges were opened which had machinery perform the task of connecting callers. Callers would now hear a dial tone instead of the “Number, please?” and use their rotary dial phones to input the number.

Property For Sale. Property For Sale.

FOR SALE

BELL TELEPHONE BUILDING, RIDEAU EXCHANGE.
Cor. King Edward Avenue and Besserer.

Two storeys and full basement. Fire-proof. Sprinkler system. In perfect condition throughout. Plans and specifications, and appointment to view same at our office only. Exclusive agents.

Thomson & Scott

Real Estate and Insurance.

204 Wellington Street, cor Bank 2-3749

Newspaper advertisement listing 251 Besserer Street for sale. The Ottawa Journal, 1939.

After the closure of the Rideau Exchange, 251 Besserer Street operated as a lab under the Dominion Department of Agriculture, Plant Products division in 1941.²⁹

In 1948, retailers J. G. Whyte & Sons Ltd. moved into 251 Besserer Street after 80 years of business selling a variety of general consumer goods on Rideau Street.³⁰ Established in 1855, J. G. Whyte & Sons Ltd. was believed to be the oldest firm in Ottawa operating under the same name.³¹ In recent years until the company's closing in 2020, it was a wholesale fireworks retailer. The namesake belongs to James Galetti Whyte, who founded the business in 1855 on Wellington Street.³² J. G. Whyte & Sons Ltd. operated at 251 Besserer Street until circa 1980.³³

In 1988, 251 Besserer Street was known as Maison Bourque, serving as headquarters for Bourque, Pierre et Fils Ltee.³⁴ Pierre Bourque was the son of 44th Ottawa Mayor E. A. Bourque, Ottawa's first French Canadian mayor.³⁵

²⁹ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1941

³⁰ The Ottawa Citizen, 1950

³¹ Ibid.

³² The Ottawa Journal, 1955

³³ [The Ottawa Journal, 1979.](#)

³⁴ The Ottawa Citizen, July 1988

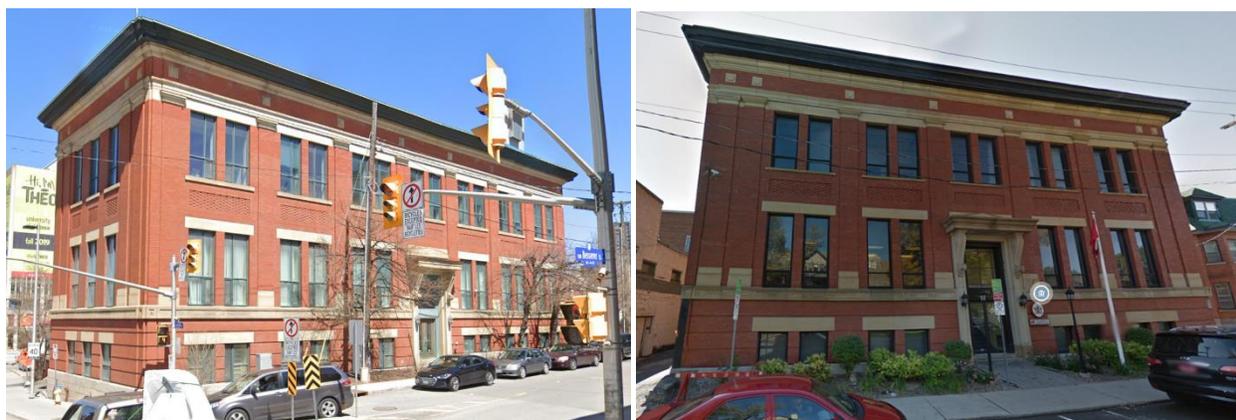
³⁵ The Ottawa Citizen, 1962

Criterion 5	
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.	No
Response to Criterion Bell exchange buildings have the potential to yield historical information significant to the understanding of women in the Bell workforce; their situation, struggles and demands. However, in the research conducted for this property, not much was found relevant to the operators who worked at this building.	

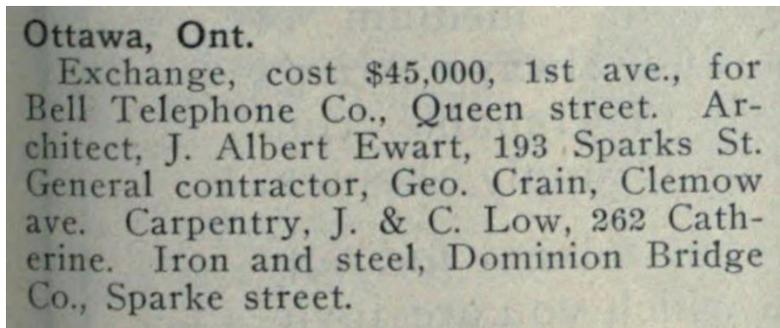
Criterion 6	
The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.	Yes
Response to Criterion This property has historical value as it was likely designed by prominent Ottawa architect John Albert Ewart. Ewart was the architect for Ottawa’s first telephone exchange, known as the Queen Exchange at 60 Queen Street and the third telephone exchange, the Carling Exchange at 200 First Avenue. The Carling Exchange is an architectural twin of the 251 Besserer Street property. Ewart’s most well-known works includes the Booth Building (165 Sparks Street), the Wellington Building (former Metropolitan Life Assurance Building), Knox Presbyterian Church at 120 Lisgar Street, and several schools.	

Supporting Details – Criterion 6

The property was likely designed by well-known Ottawa architect John Albert Ewart and reflects his other architectural work. This property’s architectural twin, historically known as the Carling Exchange located on 200 First Avenue was designed in 1913, one year after the Rideau Exchange, by architect J. A. Ewart. Additionally, the contract record for the first Bell Telephone exchange building, the Queen Exchange located on 60 Queen Street, lists Ewart as the architect.



Left: 251 Besserer Street; Right: 200 First Avenue



Source: The Contract Record and Engineering Review, 1913.

J. A. Ewart's most well-known works include the Booth Building (165 Sparks Street), the Wellington Building (180 Wellington Street), Knox Presbyterian Church (120 Lisgar Street), the May Court Club (114 Cameron Avenue), and several schools in the Old Ottawa South area as he was the main architect for the Ottawa Collegiate Institute Board. Ewart was also a member of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and an honorary life member of the Engineering Institute of Canada. He was appointed to the Federal District Commission and had a long-standing association with the Ottawa Collegiate Board. Ewart was the son of David Ewart, the Chief Dominion architect who was responsible for the many federal buildings constructed at the turn of the century including the Connaught Building, the Victoria Memorial Building and the Dominion Observatory.

The first telephone exchange in Ottawa, the Queen Exchange, was designed by Arnoldi & Calderon in 1892.³⁶ Ewart apprenticed in the office of Arnoldi and Calderon from 1887 to 1891. In 1891, Ewart studied at the School of Practical Science at the University of Toronto and moved back to Ottawa after graduating in 1895. Upon returning to Ottawa, he became a full partner of King M. Arnoldi's firm until 1904. The first telephone exchange in Ottawa, the Queen exchange, was designed by Arnoldi & Calderon in 1892. The contract record for the Queen Exchange lists Ewart as the architect.

Ewart briefly worked as a draftsman for Band, Burritt & Meredith. In 1906, he opened an office under his own name and designed many notable buildings in Ottawa for the next 45 years. His best-known works include several schools for the Ottawa School Board including the collegiate gothic style Glebe Collegiate Institute in 1922 and commercial buildings including the Chicago school Neogothic style Transportation Building in 1916, one of the first Ottawa skyscrapers. He also designed several public buildings and factories.³⁷

Criterion 7	
The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.	Yes
Response to Criterion	

³⁶ Hill, n.d.

³⁷ OAA, n.d.

The former Rideau Exchange is important in maintaining and defining the character of Sandy Hill. Developed in the 1860s, Sandy Hill is one of Ottawa's oldest neighbourhoods, with King Edward Avenue acting as the main road connecting the neighbourhood to Rideau Street and Lowertown. This part of Sandy Hill is characterized by red brick and stone buildings. 251 Besserer Street contributes to the neighbourhood through its massing and red brick construction.

Supporting Details – Criterion 7

The former Rideau Exchange is important in defining and maintaining the character of Sandy Hill. Several public and historic landmarks are located nearby, such as the Andrew W. Fleck memorial, designed by J. A. Ewart, the same architect as the former Rideau Exchange, Champagne Bath, the Ottawa Electric Hydro Station, the former Synagogue and current Ottawa French Adventist Church, and the Baptist Church. 251 Besserer Street, with its uniform brick façade and low and wide massing, supports the character of this area.



Andrew Fleck Memorial,
195 George Street



Former Champagne Bath,
321 King Edward Avenue



Ottawa Electric Hydro Station,
351 King Edward Avenue



Ottawa French Adventist
Church, the former Adath
Jeshrun Synagogue
375 King Edward Avenue



Evangelical Baptist Church,
284 King Edward Avenue

Criterion 8

The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.	Yes
<p>Response to Criterion</p> <p>The former Rideau Exchange has contextual value because it is historically and functionally linked to its surroundings. Located at the edge of Sandy Hill, the building at 251 Besserer Street has significant frontage on Besserer Street and King Edward Avenue, the main road connecting the neighbourhood to Rideau Street and Lowertown. At the turn of the century, Sandy Hill was home to some of Ottawa’s most affluent and influential individuals and was a rapidly growing residential neighbourhood. The installation of a telephone exchange indicates an increasing number of telephone subscribers in the neighbourhood, which corresponds with the area’s growth at the time. King Edward Avenue was a hub for significant historic institutional and civic historic buildings such as the Andrew W. Fleck building, Champagne Bath, the Ottawa Electric Hydro Substation #4, the former Adath Jeshrun Synagogue, the former Église évangélique baptiste d’Ottawa, and St. Alban’s Anglican Church.</p>	

Sandy Hill is one of the city’s oldest neighbourhoods. Although lots were laid out in Sandy Hill in 1838, the pace of development in Sandy Hill started to increase with the influx of civil servants to the city after Ottawa was chosen as the capital of Canada in 1857. Residential development accelerated in the late 1860s and early 1870s.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sandy Hill was home to several influential and affluent people, including former Prime Ministers Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Lester B. Pearson, Sir Charles Tupper, and Sir Robert Borden. The local community association, named Action Sandy Hill, explains that at the beginning of the 20th century, the Prime Minister’s residence, Laurier House, and one of Ottawa’s leading churches, All Saints Church, faced each other and brought together cabinet ministers, senior civil servants and rich businessmen³⁸.

Major infrastructure projects around the turn of the century provided the catalyst for accelerated development in Sandy Hill, including the construction of Cummings Bridge in 1893 which facilitated the transportation of goods between Ottawa and the neighbouring hamlet of Janeville, and the establishment of Strathcona Park along the Rideau River which brought a much-needed recreational amenity to the neighbourhood. An 1891 map of the Ottawa Electric Railway system shows a streetcar line along Laurier Avenue East and Rideau Street, servicing the north section of Sandy Hill (Included in Appendix). This line connected the neighbourhood to the Byward Market and Uppertown, also contributing to the residential expansion in the immediate area. The 1922 Fire Insurance Plans show all of Sandy Hill as a neighbourhood nearly completely built out, with an increasing variety of housing types. This rapid expansion of development in Sandy Hill corresponds with the quadrupling of Ottawa’s population

³⁸ Action Sandy Hill, n.d.

between 1880 and 1920 buoyed by an influx of public servants, merchants, and railway workers.

Two Ottawa Citizen articles from 1912 and 1919 explain that new telephone exchanges were built to cater to the increased demand in Ottawa for telephone at the time as well as the projected growth and development of the city in upcoming years (Included in Appendix, Figure 2).

The 1912 article justifies the opening of the Rideau Exchange, writing “The rapid growth of the city and the consequent increase in number of installation of telephones made the erection of a new exchange necessary in Ottawa. The number of subscribers is rapidly approaching the ten thousand mark and to handle the big volume of calls from this number of phones from one office is practically impossible owing to the necessity of having the requires number of operators under one roof in the same room”.

The 1919 article explains that the number of telephone subscribers in Ottawa rose from 11,565 in 1915 to 20,650 in 1919, almost doubling in four years. Examining population, it was found that in 1919, 1 out of 6 people had a telephone subscription in Ottawa, while in Toronto the ratio was 1 to 9, and in Kingston it was 1 to 10. “Ottawa is growing in population, in commercial institutions and in wealth!”. The article goes on to write that the building of another exchange was necessary to accommodate this increased number of subscribers and forecasted telephone demand for the next 5 years.

The chosen location for the telephone exchange is further indication that Sandy Hill at the turn of the century was an area that was accepting of change and was growing quickly in population and wealth.

Criterion 9	
The property has contextual value because it is a landmark	No
Response to Criterion	
Although this property is located at the corner of Besserer and King Edward and the oldest remaining Bell Telephone Exchange building in Ottawa, the building does not stand out as a landmark due to its low comparative height and uniform massing.	

Sources

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Appendix

was really unique. Way back in the old pre-war days we had a Rideau and a Queen exchange. Carling also had been begun. But in 1915 the number of subscribers amounted to only 11,565 while today the list comprises 20,650 or an increase of 9,085. In fact in four short years, Ottawa has nearly doubled its telephone subscription list. In this respect, Ottawa, which has 1 telephone to every 6 of the population, is considerably farther advanced than Toronto, which has 1 for every 9 and Kingston, which has 1 for 10 of the population. Ottawa is growing in population, in commercial institutions, and in wealth!

To take care of this increased telephone demand which came upon the heels of Ottawa's greater business and to provide for prospective development and increase during the next five years, it became necessary in addition to the outside plant, such as underground and aerial cable, to arrange for another exchange. The

The Ottawa Citizen, 1919.

To the average citizen, the event of connecting up a new telephone exchange holds but little importance, but a brief description of how the work is accomplished and the need of it, is both interesting and instructive. The rapid growth of the city and the consequent increase in number of installation of telephones, made the erection of a new exchange necessary in Ottawa. The number of subscribers is rapidly approaching the ten thousand mark, and to handle the big volume of calls from this number of 'phones from one office is practically impossible owing to the necessity of having the required number of operators under one roof in the same room.

The Ottawa Citizen, 1912.

Telephone Economy
Talk No. 13

Why So Many Exchanges?

WHY do you build exchanges at so many different points in the same city?" a subscriber asks; "Why not have one big exchange serving the whole city?"

¶ There are two basic reasons for multiplying exchanges.

¶ Every operator at a switchboard has to be within arm's length of all the numbers on that board. She must be able to connect you with any number asked for. The reach of the normal operator limits the capacity of the switchboard to 10,000 lines. Hence, as the city grows, new exchanges must be built.

¶ The other reason is economic. The pair of wires connecting your telephone runs, not only to the street but right to your Central office. If there were only one central office in a big city the length of subscribers' lines to the single exchange would make the initial cost, the up-keep and repair-cost prohibitive.

¶ There are also important engineering reasons for multi-exchange development, but the above two are fundamental.

¶ *We wish to defer the opening of new exchanges until after the war. Help us by the practice of telephone economy.*

The Bell Telephone Company of Canada

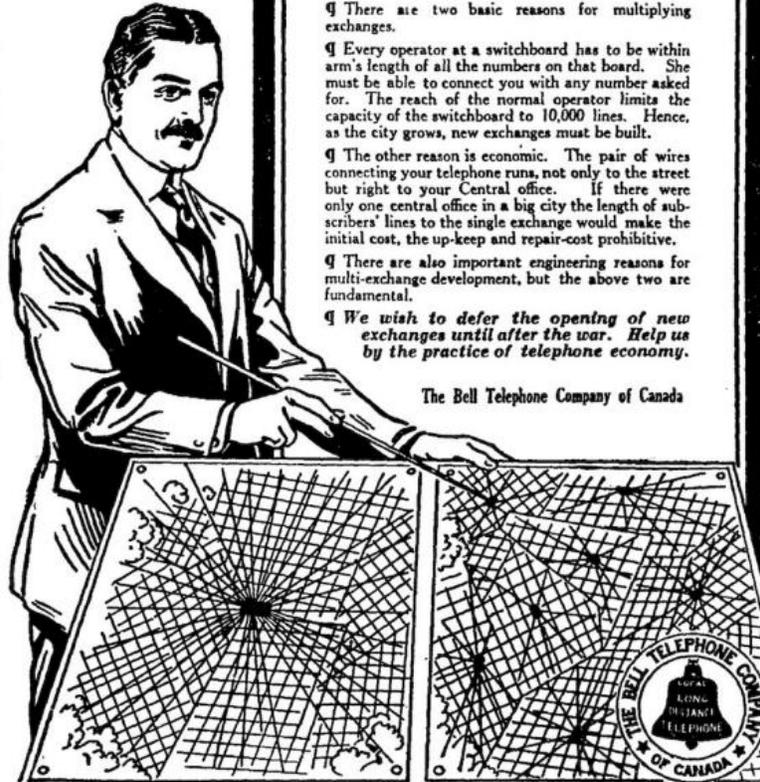


Figure 1: Telephone Economy Talk No. 13. 1918.

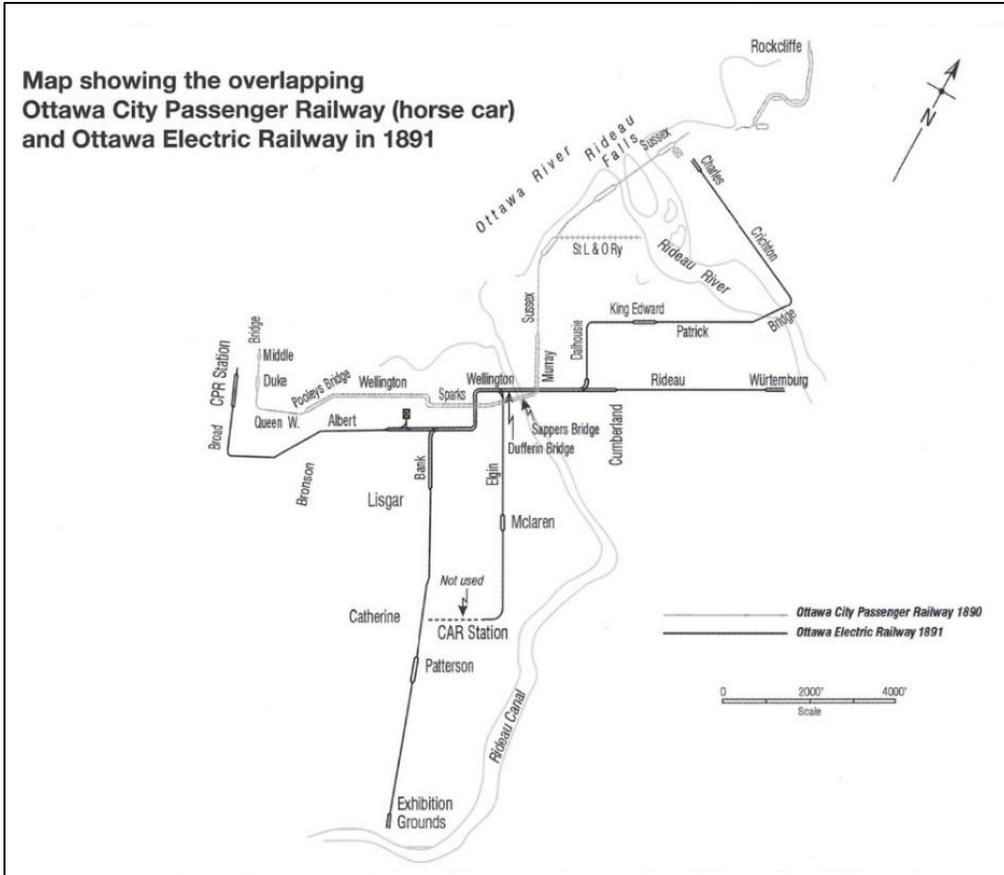


Figure 2: Map showing streetcar lines in 1891. [Ottawa's Streetcars, Bill McKeown, 2005]