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BURKHOLDER BUILDING
BANK STREET, OTTAWA

HERITAGE STRUCTURE REPORT



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The Burkholder Building was visited a number of times in early November 2005, in order to understand its original design, ongoing evolution and present condition. This is a report on those findings. The investigation was preliminary, and there will be a requirement for more detailed investigations and design development if part of the building is to be retained.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of both Richard Chmiel, architect for the site redevelopment project, and Sally Coutts, heritage planner with the City of Ottawa.

Original design and early evolution:

It appears that the current Burkholder Buildings is an amalgamation of two, and perhaps three, buildings, which had their own design patterns and structural systems. The mansard roof, therefore, which is the most prominent surviving heritage feature, was likely put on in the early 20th Century at a time when the three smaller buildings came under single ownership.

The mansard roof is divided into three equal sections. Behind this façade, however, the building itself was divided into unequal parts. The southernmost portion, for example, occupies more than one third of the space and its original northern wall partially intersects the central window of the newer mansard dormer. Similarly, from the historic photo, it would appear that the northern portion is divided into a small central bay and a larger northern bay. The ground level façade, therefore, reflected this original structural bay size, while the upper level façade was organized around its symmetrical tripartite division.



Fig. 1. Historic photo showing lower floor divisions into two larger bays and one small central bay.

The rear façade indicates the separate building volumes. The brickwork changes in colour and pattern at the junctions, and the rear bays are different sizes.



Fig. 2 Rear elevation showing building divisions – south and central bays

Recent evolution:

In more recent years, the lower floor structure of the northern bays has been removed and an entirely new steel structure of north-south and east-west steel beams has been introduced. The original bearing wall between the central and northern bays, visible in the historic photograph, appears to have been removed, allowing a single large retail space with continuous glass windows along the Bank Street façade.



Fig. 3 Current appearance. A single modern storefront on the left replaces the earlier two bays. Also visible in this photograph is the lack of alignment of the southern bay (on the right) with the pattern established by the dormer windows above.



Fig.4. The original hardwood floor is visible on the left, above the 2x10 wood joists @ 24"o.c. Immediately below is one of the series of east-west 8" deep steel beams, and below these is a welded bracket and a 14" deep north-south steel beam.



Fig.5 The current retail space on the ground floor of the northern bays. The boxed-in beam contains one of the 14" north-south steel beams. The front façade does not have one of these transverse beams, but is carried by the cantilevered 8" steel beams above.

Current conditions

The building appears to be relatively stable structurally. However, it is a complex mix of original buildings, extensive early modifications with the introduction of the mansard roof, and extensive recent modifications with the removal of the ground floor structure and material on the two northern bays.

The upper floor areas still contain traces of their earlier finishes, including lath and plaster walls, simple baseboards with ogee mouldings, four panel doors, and some paneled walls. Some areas have double layers of tongue-and-groove floor boards.



Fig.6 Upper floor, northern portion, showing typical early-twentieth century trim details.



Fig.7 details showing intersection between bearing wall (left) and middle dormer (right). Original lath and plaster finish is visible behind later drywall. Baseboard and window sill are original.

The layout of these upper floor areas has undergone many changes to allow for the various industrial uses, including most recently the preparation of furs.

The dormer windows are relatively intact. On the exterior, the standing seam metal roof appears to be the original, repainted many times. The window trim retains its dentilled cornices. Much of the window sash survives, but some have disappeared, replaced with informal wood structures to hold air-conditioning units. On the interior, they have some remnants of their original lath and plaster finishes and wood corner beads, but there have been many other applied finishes. The structure of the mansard roof is composed of 3"x6" wood framing with 1"x6" sheathing boards.



Fig.8 Mansard roof with original standing-seam metal roofing, dormer with dentilled cornice, and original window sash in two of the three frame units.



Fig.9 Interior view of the mansard roof, showing remnants of lath and plaster, with wood corner bead, and 3"x6" framing member above.

Heritage Value

The heritage value of this building has been significantly compromised over the years. Almost no evidence remains of the original two or three buildings, other than the remaining brick bearing walls on the southern bay. The rest of the ground floor has a completely new structural system, holding up what remains of the upper floor interior.

The only surviving element of interest is the mansard roof. Although not original to the building, it appears to date from the early twentieth century and has survived relatively unchanged in its exterior appearance. It is also structurally sound, although there is some question of whether it could be detached from the remaining wood floor and roof structures. Its interior finishes have been significantly damaged.



Fig.10 Historic reality



Fig.11 Contemporary reality

Possible interventions

The site of the Burkholder Building is about to undergo major redevelopment. There appear to be two options for dealing with the heritage character of this building.

Option 1

The first option would be to retain the mansard roof element, as the historically intact fragment of the earlier building.

This mansard roof element exists almost in isolation, as it no longer corresponds to an older ground floor configuration. The ground floor interiors no longer have their original structure, their original layout, or their original finishes.

If this element were to be retained, it would have to be removed while the rest of the building was taken down around it. It would then be reinstated in exactly its current location and configuration. This reinstatement would involve significant restoration or reconstruction of the roof elements. The standing seam metal roof is noticeably rusted along its lower edge, and may have to be completely redone. The window sash may need significant repair, and the missing sash would have to be replaced. As part of the reinstatement, it might be decided to use the original as a template and do an accurate reproduction.

Option 2

The second option is to retain the urban design quality of the heritage building, but not its physical fabric or detail. Specifically, this option would involve maintaining a two-story, mansard-roof form in the location of the present building, but reinterpreted in a contemporary design tied into the rest of the redevelopment project.

The aim of this approach would be to accept the loss of the fabric of the building, which is already severely compromised, but retain the sidewalk presence, massing, and configuration. Continued sidewalk retail would reinforce the intentions of this approach.

The aim of both options would be to retain the memory of the Burkholder Building as part of the historic streetscape façade of Bank Street. The emphasis in physical terms would be on retaining or reinterpreting the second floor mansard roof element. The intention in broader functional terms would be to retain the sidewalk retail function that has been part of this site for a century or more.

Respectfully submitted

Julian Smith
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