

Heritage Designation Brief



The Harness Factory

201 George Street North

Peterborough Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee

2025

Heritage Designation Status Sheet

Street Address: 201 George Street North

Roll Number: 040050177000000

Short Legal Description: PT LTS 1 & 2 N DALHOUSIE ST & W
GEORGE ST DESIGNATED AS PTS 1, 2
& 3, 45R1175 ; T/W OVER PT 4,
45R1175 AS IN R317915 ; S/T OVER
PTS 2 & 3, 45R1175 AS IN R713207 ;
PETERBOROUGH

PACAC Review Date: November 4, 2025

Heritage Type: Built Structure

Designation Type: Ontario Heritage Act – Part IV

Designation Brief Completed Date: October 2025

Designation Brief Completed by: Emily Hamilton

Comments:

STATEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE VALUE OR INTEREST

The subject property has been researched and evaluated to determine its cultural heritage significance under Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act R.S.O. 1990 (the Act). A property is eligible for designation if it has physical, historical, associative or contextual value and meets **any two** of the nine criteria set out under Regulation 9/06 of the Act. Staff have determined that 201 George Street North meets criteria and has cultural heritage value or interest and merits designation under the Act.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:

i. is a rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method:

201 George Street North is an early example of Victorian Industrial Architecture in Peterborough. It is also one of few manufacturing buildings left in downtown Peterborough.

ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit:

The property displays a high degree of craftsmanship through the decorative brickwork that adorns the building and rusticated stone foundation.

iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement:

There are no specific technical or scientific achievements associated with this property.

2. The property has historical value or associative value because it:

i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community:

201 George Street North is associated with the industrial and commercial sectors of Peterborough. As a manufacturing building built just before the turn of the century, it represents the beginning of Peterborough's economic boom of the early 1900s. It also has extremely strong associations with Benjamin Franklin Ackerman, owner and operator of the B. F. Ackerman Harness Company, which made leather goods for horses before branching out into leather shoes, creating the famous 'Peterboro Shoe'. Ackerman also contributed to the community by being head of the Children's Aid Society and Board of Education for several years.

ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture:

This property has the potential to yield information that contributes to an understanding of the development of the manufacturing sector in Peterborough.

iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant to the community:

The architect and/or builder of this building is not known.

3. The property has contextual value because it:

i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of the area:

This property is important in defining the south end of the downtown core as the former industrial centre of the city. It is one of few remaining reminders of this use.

ii. is physically, functionally, visually, or historically linked to its surroundings:

This property is historically linked to its surroundings as a former industrial turned commercial building in the south end of Peterborough's downtown core. The J. J. Turner building at 140 King Street is another such example.

iii. is a landmark:

This building is a landmark in its surrounding area. At the end of the downtown area, this building serves as a reminder of what the streetscape looked like before modernization

Design and Physical Value



The Harness Factory has significant design and physical value as a representative example of the Victorian Industrial style. Its massing is rectangular with symmetrical façades, a straightforward expression of its industrial function.

Built just before the turn of the century in 1898, the structure is comprised of heavy timber beams and structural brick, a typical construction system for industrial buildings of

the period. Architectural details, though modest, enhance its design significance. The rubble stone foundation showcases the beginning of the industrial boom in Peterborough by being one of the oldest surviving manufacturing buildings. The brick pilasters create a sense of rhythm and balance across all façades, terminating below the roofline, leaving a frieze band that has been decorated with square brickwork. This feature seems to be deliberately designed to accommodate signage and advertising, allowing the building itself to serve as a billboard for the company's products. However, unlike a later industrial building, 387 George Street South, the frieze has decorative brickwork which does not allow for clear signage. The comparison between these two buildings shows how the importance of advertising changed over time and makes the frieze on 201 George Street North an early example integration of commercial identity with architectural form which later became a hallmark of industrial design in the early twentieth century.

Historical and Associative Value



The Harness Factory has strong historical and associative value as an early industrial factory in Peterborough that was owned, operated and named after Benjamin Franklin Ackerman, pictured left. Ackerman was born in Prince Edward County in 1850. He married Frances Lumnden in 1875 and together they had six children. During World War I, two of Ackerman's sons, Arthur and Charles fought on the front line with Arthur dying from his injuries. Outside of his business ventures, Ackerman spent several years helping the citizens of Peterborough. He served on the Board of Education from 1904-1916 focusing on fire prevention in schools during his tenure. In 1922, he was elected president of the Children's Aid Society continuing his passion for the safety of children. He died on September 19, 1933, at the age of 86.

Ackerman brought his newly established harness factory to Peterborough from Port Perry in 1892. He was such a respected employer at the time that many of his workers from Port Perry moved to Peterborough to continue working for him. In 1898, the business grew out of the initial site so Ackerman asked council and was granted a tax exemption for ten years so he could build a new one, the new factory is the subject property; 201 George Street North. As of 1901, Ackerman was seen as a respectable employer because he was one of a select few, the others being General Electric Canada and William Hamilton Manufacturing Company, that would give his workers a half day off on Saturday.



However, the respect given by his employees turned sour in April 1907 when several of the unionized workers went on strike. The demands were an increase of \$1.18 per week and to work one hour less a week. Ackerman explained that his employees consisted of unionized and non-unionized workers. The non-unionized workers made more per hour as they could prove their merit. Meanwhile, the unionized workers could not so they made less. The amount that Ackerman was paying the unionized workers was \$0.60 more per week than the union's minimum. About a month into the strike, a vice-president of the union arrived in Peterborough to support the strikers and to try to reach an agreement with Ackerman. Ackerman told the committee that represented the striking workers that he's willing to pay them an increase under the condition that they return to work and leave the union. The workers refused this deal stating that it was their right to belong to a union. Shortly after the Trade and Labour Council met and discussed the strike comparing Ackerman's employment practices to a sweat shop. After this the strike is not mentioned again so it was likely that Ackerman employed non-unionized workers to cover the gap left by the unionized workers. Despite the set back

from the strike, by 1911 his business was so busy that he set up a branch in Regina to help bring his products to Western Canada.

With the car becoming a popular mode of transportation, the need for horse harnesses and other leather goods for horse riding began to decline. With this shift, the company moved from making leather goods for horses to leather shoes in 1917, producing the 'Peterboro Shoe'. To trial a shoe factory in Peterborough, Ackerman asked city council for another tax exemption for ten years. This by-law was put to a vote by the citizens and was passed. The Peterboro Shoe was featured in several editions of *The Shoe and Leather Journal* which increased its popularity and was sold all over Canada, helping to increase Peterborough's presence on the national stage. The Ackerman Company remained in the building until the 1950s.

Contextual Value

201 George Street North has strong contextual value as a landmark commercial property at the edge of Peterborough's downtown. It is one of few historical buildings left on its axis into the downtown core and the only one that represents Peterborough's industrial era. It is a landmark in its area due to its height. In addition to its landmark status, it is also visually, functionally and historically linked to its surroundings as a commercial building. Visually, it contributes to the mixed character of George Street by standing as one of the few remaining non-residential historic structures in the area. Functionally and historically, it preserves the memory of an earlier landscape in which factories and workshops were integrated into residential neighbourhoods in the city's south end.

"The short statement of reason for designation, including a description of the heritage attributes along with all other components of the Heritage Designation Brief constitute the "Reasons for the Designation" required under the Ontario Heritage Act. The Heritage Designation Brief is available for viewing in the City Clerk's office during regular business hours."

SHORT STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

201 George Street North is a landmark industrial building in Peterborough on the edge of the downtown area. It is one of few surviving buildings in the area, which was once the industrial center of the city. Built just before the turn of the twentieth century for the B. F. Ackerman and Son Company Ltd. it showcases an early example of an industrial building and showcases key Victorian elements such as symmetry and evenly spaced windows. It also showcases an early rendition of advertising by featuring tapered pilasters and a frieze that features decorative brickwork.

It has strong historical associations as being the factory for the prominent B. F. Ackerman and Son Company Ltd., which made leather harnesses and other leather goods for horse riding. When the invention of the automobile took off, the company made a pivot and started making leather shoes, producing the 'Peterboro Shoe' which allowed them to maintain their prominent status in the community.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE ATTRIBUTES TO BE DESIGNATED

The Reasons for Designation include the following heritage attributes and apply to all elevations and the roof, including all facades, entrances, windows, chimneys, and trim. Together with the construction materials of brick and their related building techniques.

Exterior Elements:

- Three-story red brick construction
- Windows set between pilasters
- Decorative brickwork
- Rusticated foundation
- Central entrance on George Street
- Fenestration
- Construction to the lot lines
- Views of the property from George Street and Dalhousie Street