

Porter Block



Date of Construction	1910
Address	643-645 - 2 (Main) Street SE
Original Owners	James & Robert Porter
Architect	Unknown
Contractor	Arthur P. Burns
Neighbourhood	Downtown/SE Hill
Legal	1491;14;11

Description of Historic Place

Porter Block is a two-storey masonry building located adjacent to a vacant lot on the south side of 2nd Street SE between South Railway Street and 6th Avenue SE in the commercial core of Medicine Hat. This historic commercial building is notable for its central inset entry and large storefront windows, leaded amethyst glass transoms over the upper storey windows, split block sandstone pilasters, wooden storefront, and sandstone roof cornice with flat parapet roof and signband displaying 'Porter Block'.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

Porter Block, built in 1910, is valued as an integral component of a grouping of early commercial buildings in downtown Medicine Hat. Constructed during a period of economic growth prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Porter Block's design reflects the city's rapid growth and optimism during the Edwardian era from the 1900s to the 1910s. This period of economic prosperity in Medicine Hat built upon earlier times of growth associated with real

estate speculation, railway expansion, resource exploitation, manufacturing, and the evolution of Medicine Hat as a regional trade centre. The building's prosperity is further reflected through the caliber of businesses that occupied the Porter Block following its construction including a jeweler, dental parlours, an insurance office, and the architectural office of prominent local architect William T. Williams.

The Porter Block is also valued as a legacy of early Medicine Hat pioneers, Robert D. Porter and James A. Porter, who developed the site and contributed to the early growth of Medicine Hat. Originally from Goderich, Ontario, the Porter brothers' father, Samuel Porter, born in County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, arrived in Medicine Hat in September of 1883. Samuel's three sons Robert, Richard, and James soon joined him in Medicine Hat and worked with their father on the building of the CPR railway. The Porters were among the earliest European inhabitants in Medicine Hat and one of the first ranching families in the area. Their homestead was established in the area now known as Porter's Hill and the family ranched there, and on

Gros Ventre Creek, for many years. The brothers, James and Robert, later established a large ranch on Stoney Creek. In addition to ranching, the Porter brothers were involved in a variety of business ventures including freight hauling and livery businesses. Robert and James Porter's only venture into commercial development was the Porter Block. The brothers tendered the building in March of 1910 and a building permit was issued for its construction on May of that same year. The two-storey commercial building cost approximately \$10,000 to build and at the time of its completion was noted by the Medicine Hat News as being "the most sumptuous and elegant in Medicine Hat."

The Porter Block is further valued as a distinctive example in Medicine Hat of Edwardian era Classical Revival style and for its use of locally procured materials. Built by local contractors, A.P. Burns, using locally manufactured brick, the building expresses a high understanding of the Classical Revival style. Elements of this style include its full-height storefront with central recessed entry and full-width transom, split block sandstone pilasters, ornate sandstone roof cornice with modillions, and tripartite windows

with leaded amethyst glass transoms at the second storey. Fueled by an improved understanding of ancient Greek and Roman buildings through the study of archaeology, Classical Revival-style civic buildings were prominent during the Edwardian era as they projected a sense of permanence and security and possessed an elegant simplicity of form. The Porter Block exhibits a high level of historic integrity and lends itself to the early commercial character of Medicine Hat.

The Porter Block is further valued as a landmark in the downtown core for its prominent siting and as an intact and unique example of Edwardian era architecture.

Porter Block (far left) amongst the bustle of 2nd Street, circa 1928



Photogelatine Engravings Co. Ltd.
Second St. - Medicine Hat. Alta.
Souvenir of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Glenbow
Library, Calgary, Alberta.

Character-Defining Elements - Porter Block (643-645 - 2 Street SE)



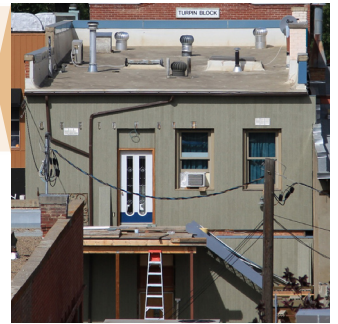
- Location mid-block on the south side of 2nd Street SE in the commercial centre of Medicine Hat, with minimal setback from the street

- Connection with surrounding commercial buildings of a similar age and construction in the downtown area



- Form, scale, and massing as expressed by its: two-storey height, rectangular plan, flat roof with flat parapet on the front facade

- Masonry construction including: red brick with grey mortar; stippled sandstone split block pilasters and sills



- Classical Revival-style details such as: elegant simplicity of form; sandstone roof cornice with decorative modillions and brackets; carved sandstone storefront cornice; full-height storefront with central recessed entry

- Window fenestration such as: wooden-sash tripartite windows with amethyst leaded glass transom on upper storey; large storefront window openings with full-width transom at storefront level; brick segmental arched window openings on east façade



- Additional element such as 'Porter Block' sign band

- Interior features such as decorative tin ceiling



Statement of Integrity - Porter Block (643-645 - 2 Street SE)

Applicable Significance Criteria

This site is significant because...

Theme / Activity / Cultural Practice / Event ☒ Yes ☐ No

-Porter Block, built in 1910, is valued as an integral component of a grouping of early commercial buildings in downtown Medicine Hat. Constructed during a period of economic growth prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Porter Block's design reflects the city's rapid growth and optimism during the Edwardian era from the 1900s to the 1910 (**Theme Value - Town Development in Medicine Hat**).

-The Porter Block is also valued as a legacy of early Medicine Hat pioneers, Robert D. Porter and James A. Porter, who developed the site and contributed to the early growth of Medicine Hat. The Porters were among the earliest European inhabitants in Medicine Hat and one of the first ranching families in the area (**Theme Value - Oasis on the Prairies: Settling Medicine Hat**).

-The Porter Block is further valued as a distinctive example in Medicine Hat of Edwardian era Classical Revival style and for its use of locally procured materials (**Theme Value - Built in Medicine Hat**).

Institution / Person ☐ Yes ☒ No

Design / Style / Construction ☐ Yes ☒ No

Information Potential ☐ Yes ☒ No

Landmark / Symbolic Value ☒ Yes ☐ No

The Porter Block is further valued as a landmark in the downtown core for its prominent siting and as an intact and unique example of Edwardian era architecture.

Period of Significance

1906 to 1913 Pre-First World War Boom, Age of Optimism

Chronology of Alterations

1970s-80s - Replacement of storefront

Aspects of Integrity

LOCATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The location of the building on 2nd Street SE has not changed.

DESIGN ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The design of the building has been altered primarily at the storefront level. Windows have been replaced and filled in.

ENVIRONMENT ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The building continues to be sited in Medicine Hat's downtown commercial core.

MATERIALS ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The original materials of the building have been primarily altered at the storefront level.

WORKMANSHIP ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The workmanship of the building is apparent in the building's condition, quality materials, and details.

FEELING ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The feeling of the building has not changed and continues to contribute to the city's commercial streetscape.

ASSOCIATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The association of the building has not altered.

Statement of Integrity continued on next page...

Statement of Integrity - Porter Block (643-645 - 2 Street SE)**Statement of Integrity**

The Porter Block maintains all the aspects of integrity necessary for it to convey its significance / heritage value.

The Porter Block possesses a fair degree of architectural integrity with a significant amount of its original exterior fabric in situ. The building is situated in its original location with its form, scale, and massing intact. Overall, the red brick exterior exposed on the side and rear of the building is in good condition with only minimal brick and mortar loss and the concrete foundation exhibits no evidence of failure. The upper story of the primary façade closely resembles its original Edwardian era construction with its flat parapet roof, sign band, sandstone cornice with brackets and modillions, window fenestration with amethyst lead glass transom over the second storey windows, and split sandstone block pilasters all intact and in fair condition. The storefront of the Porter Block has been significantly altered, typical of many of Medicine Hat's pre-First World War buildings. The amethyst leaded glass transom over the storefront was removed and replaced with clear glass and the original large glass plate storefront windows were replaced with aluminum-sash replicas; the door to the second storey remains in its original location. The side and rear facades of the building also exhibit evidence of alterations with a number of fenestrations' altered or bricked in and areas of the brick façade which have been painted or clad over with siding.

Additional Images - Porter Block (643-645 - 2 Street SE)

Detail of the front facade of the Porter Block showing the signband, modillions, and the amethyst leaded glass transoms


Donald Luxton & Associates
September 2012



Donald Luxton & Associates
September 2012

Side (west) facade of the Porter Block. The entire facade became visible flowing a September 2007 fire which consumed the adjoining one-storey structure

Heritage Evaluation Form - Porter Block (643-645 - 2 Street SE)

 Medicine Hat The Gas City Heritage Evaluation Form	Site Number	Category A
	Community District Downtown	
	Designation	

Site Name(s): Porter Block			
Municipal Address: 643-645 - 2 Street SE		Date of Construction:	Y 1910
Consultant(s): Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.		Evaluation Date:	Y 12 M 09 D 05
Heritage Committee: Heritage Resource Committee			
Heritage Planner: Jeanie Gartly			
		Total	
		85	

History (H)	E	VG	G	F	P		(H) SCORE
H.1 Associations/Patterns	X					40	40
H.2 Age		X				10	
Comments: H.1 The Porter Block is significant for its links to early Medicine Hat pioneer James A. Porter. H2. Constructed 1910.							

Architecture (A)	E	VG	G	F	P		(A) SCORE
A.1 Style/Type/Design		X				20	30
A.2 Designer/Builder				X		3	
A.3 Construction Technology				X		3	
A.4 Interior Details						-	
A.5 Alterations			X			-10	
Comments: A.1 An ideal example of commercial Classical Revival style. A.2 Architect – Unknown. Contractor – Arthur P. Burns. A.3 Brick building with sandstone element and amethyst glass transoms. A.4 Unknown A.5 Storefront and rear of the building has been altered.							

Urban Context (C)	E	VG	G	F	P		(C) SCORE
C.1 Landmark/Character		X				10	15
C.2 Streetscape/Landscape			X			5	
Comments: C.1 The building is a landmark in the downtown commercial core. C.2 The building is an integral component of the commercial streetscape.							