

New Baker Block



Date of Construction	1912
Address	517A-523A North Railway Street SE
Original Owner	Herbert Baker
Architect	James E. Daly and Herbert Baker
Contractor	Herbert Baker
Neighbourhood	River Flats
Legal	60324;41;2

Description of Historic Place

The New Baker Block is a two-storey, brick-clad building designed with Classical Revival stylistic influences. The building is connected to a grouping of historic commercial brick buildings of similar scale and style on the east side of North Railway Street, located in the commercial district of the River Flats neighbourhood in the City of Medicine Hat. The building features two nearly identical structural bays, each with a storefront and double-assembly window openings at the second storey, mounted by parged concrete lintels. The building is detailed with simple brick corbelled cornices and pressed tin cornices.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

The New Baker Block, constructed in 1912, is valued for its contribution to a grouping of historic commercial buildings constructed to support the River Flats neighbourhood during the Edwardian boom period. The River Flats neighbourhood developed to support Medicine Hat's clay and gas industry-based factories,

which were centered on the outskirts of the neighbourhood. Propelled by the presence of high quality clay, the exploitation of inexpensive gas, and proximity to the CPR, River Flats housed the majority of Medicine Hat's resource-based industries including clay based companies, greenhouses, milling, and the manufacturing of goods. The proliferation of these industries, in turn, facilitated the development of River Flats as a working class residential and commercial neighbourhood. The New Baker Block, situated in close proximity to the rail station, is a testament to the economic stability of the commercial district in the River Flats neighbourhood along North Railway Street. The building was owned and built by H.A. Baker, a city clerk and former CPR employee. Working with architect James E. Daly, Baker constructed the south building first, and later constructed the second building to the north using the same architectural plans. The buildings were constructed to house commercial storefronts at the first storey and apartments on the second storey. The first tenants of Suite 517A were Oscar Barker and Roy Patten, who owned a gentleman's clothing

store. The building is a modest expression of the Classical Revival-style, popular in commercial buildings in Medicine Hat during the Edwardian boom period in the early 1910s. Elements of this style include its two-storey massing with storefronts at the main level and living space in the upper storey. The building displays simple, yet elegant stylistic details expressed through its symmetrical double assembly wooden-sash windows with parged lintels and sills, brick corbelling at the cornice and quoining on the pilasters.

As long-time tenants of the New Baker Block, the building is also valued for its association to the Chinese community in Medicine Hat, and is symbolic of the importance of the Chinese merchant class to the city. The Chinese community was established in the 1890s, after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1883. The first Chinese resident arrived in 1887, and by the 1910s a small conglomerate of Chinese-owned businesses had been established on North Railway Street. The Chinese merchant class was important to the development of the River Flats neighbourhood as it established much-needed shops including laundries, grocery stores, medicinal shops, and restaurants,

all of which catered to both the Chinese and non-Chinese residents. The first Chinese tenant in the New Baker Block leased Suite 521A as a rooming house for other Chinese residents. In addition, Chinese tenants operated businesses out of the New Baker Block from 1919 until the 1970s.

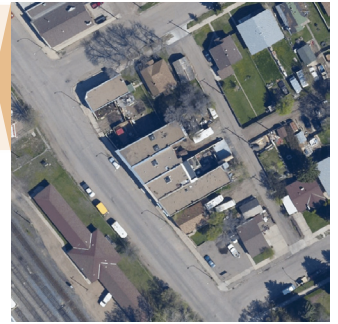
The New Baker Block consists of the two identical central structures seen in this historical photo. They were built at separate times, but both within the same year. The two flanking blocks are still extant as well



Character-Defining Elements - New Baker Block (517A-523A North Railway Street SE)



- Location on the east side of North Railway Street, as part of a contiguous grouping of historic commercial buildings in the River Flats neighbourhood



- Typically commercial form, scale, and massing as expressed by its: irregular plan, two-storey height, built to the property lines, full basement, lane access, and flat roof



- Masonry construction, including pressed red brick walls at the second storey



- Commercial Classical Revival-style details such as: two symmetrical bays with storefronts at first storey and residential at second storey; intact pressed metal storefront cornice on 521-23a; paired window openings at second storey surmounted by parged concrete lintels and sills below; prominent pressed metal cornice; brick corbelling at cornice and brick quoining on pilasters



- Original double assembly rectangular window openings at second storey; segmental arched window openings in rear of building; access to second storey via single door on north sides of each structural bay



- Exterior brick chimneys at rear of building

- Original interior features including: fir floors; tin ceiling; iron floor grates; wooden stairways to second storey; skylight; and 6-panel wooden doors with original hardware



Statement of Integrity - New Baker Block (517A-523A North Railway Street SE)

Applicable Significance Criteria

This site is significant because...

Theme / Activity / Cultural Practice / Event Yes No

-The New Baker Block, constructed in 1912, is valued for its contribution to a grouping of historic commercial buildings constructed to support the River Flats neighbourhood during the Edwardian boom period (**Theme Value – City Development in Medicine Hat**).

-As long-time tenants of the New Baker Block, the building is also valued for its association with the Chinese population in Medicine Hat, and is symbolic of the importance of the Chinese merchant class to the city (**Theme Value – Oasis in the Prairies: Settling Medicine Hat**).

Institution / Person Yes No

Design / Style / Construction Yes No

Information Potential Yes No

Landmark / Symbolic Value Yes No

Period of Significance

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

Chronology of Alterations

1957 - Major renovation
2000s - Major interior renovation of interior of 521-523A

Aspects of Integrity

LOCATION Yes No Not Applicable

The location of the building has not been altered.

DESIGN Yes No Not Applicable

The design of the building has been altered at the storefront level but is original at the second storey for both buildings.

ENVIRONMENT Yes No Not Applicable

The building continues to be connected to historic commercial buildings.

MATERIALS Yes No Not Applicable

The material of the building is largely intact.

WORKMANSHIP Yes No Not Applicable

The quality of the workmanship of the building is clearly evident.

FEELING Yes No Not Applicable

The building continues to function with commercial businesses on the main floor and living space above.

ASSOCIATION Yes No Not Applicable

The association of the building has not changed.

Statement of Integrity

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

The New Baker Block is in good condition and has retained much of its original materiality as well as form, scale, and massing. The storefronts of both structural bays have been stuccoed sometime in the 1970s to 1980s, and the central recessed entryway present on the original building has been removed. The storefront cornice has been retained and maintained at 521-523A. Also, the 521-523A building's original multi-light fluted glass transom originally located in the storefront has been relocated to the interior as a decorative element. The second storey has remained relatively intact, including its substantial pressed tin cornice. Original wooden-sash windows have been replaced with aluminum-sash windows at the second storey and rear of the building. An extensive rehabilitation/restoration of the interior of 521-523A occurred in the 2000s. Many original elements such as the tin ceiling, fir floors, wooden trim, and stairway were restored.

Additional Images - New Baker Block (517A-523A North Railway Street SE)

Contextual view of the New Baker Block, showing its proximity to the residential area of River Flats, and the CPR rail yard




Donald Luxton & Associates
June 2013



The two identical blocks erected by Herbert Baker. Two building permits (#85 and #349) were applied for in 1912 by Baker

Donald Luxton & Associates
June 2013

Heritage Evaluation Form - New Baker Block (517A-523A North Railway Street SE)

 Medicine Hat The Gas City Heritage Evaluation Form	Site Number	Category B
	Community District River Flats	
	Designation	

Site Name(s): New Baker Block			
Municipal Address: 621 - 5 Street SE		Date of Construction:	Y 1912
Consultant(s): Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.		Evaluation Date:	Y 13 M 05 D 16
Heritage Committee: Heritage Resource Committee			
Heritage Planner: Chris Reddy			
			Total
			62

History (H)	E	VG	G	F	P		(H) SCORE
H.1 Associations/Patterns		X				20	30
H.2 Age		X				10	
Comments: H.1 The New Baker Block is valued for its contribution to a grouping of historic commercial buildings constructed to support the River Flats neighbourhood during the Edwardian boom period. H.2 Constructed in 1912.							

Architecture (A)	E	VG	G	F	P		(A) SCORE
A.1 Style/Type/Design			X			10	12
A.2 Designer/Builder				X		3	
A.3 Construction Technology			X			5	
A.4 Interior Details			X			4	
A.5 Alterations			X			-10	
Comments: A.1 Commercial form with Classical Revival-style detailing. A.2 Architect – H. Baker, Contractor – H. Baker A.3 Masonry construction. A.4 Original interior elements including fir floors, tin ceiling, 6-panel doors with original hardware, floor registers. A.5 Building exterior fabric and form, scale, and massing intact; however, the storefront has been significantly altered.							

Urban Context (C)	E	VG	G	F	P		(C) SCORE
C.1 Landmark/Character	X					20	20
C.2 Streetscape/Landscape		X				10	
Comments: C.1 The building is a component of a grouping of early commercial buildings. C.2 The building's historic aesthetic contributes to continuity of the neighbourhood.							