

FEDERAL BUILDING (OLD ARMOURY), JOLIETTE, QUEBEC



17 Sherbrooke, Québec Armoury constructed in 1911-12. (PAC, PA-10453.)

FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE

BUILDING REPORT 85-66

TITLE: Rideau Hall
Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario

SOURCE: Staff Report, Architectural History Division

Introduction

Rideau Hall (Figure 1), the official residence of the governor general, was originally constructed in 1838 as the home of a local industrialist, Thomas McKay. In 1864 it was leased as a temporary residence for the governor general until a suitable house could be erected elsewhere. Rideau Hall was purchased in 1868 and was enlarged and transformed in a number of campaigns between 1865 and 1913 directed by architects of the Department of Public Works. As the official Government House, the residence of the Crown's representative in Canada, it is a focal point of political and social life in the nation's capital.

I HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Bytown developed primarily as a lumbering town following the construction of the Rideau Canal in the 1820s. A radical transformation in its nature commenced with the decision that Ottawa should become the capital of the Province of Canada. Following the Act of Union in 1841 Kingston was the capital of the United Canadas but the capital was soon moved to Montreal.

Following the riots of 1849 it was decided that the capital would alternate between Quebec City and Toronto. These nomadic wanderings proved expensive and confusing and in 1856 the Legislative Assembly decided to end this system, voting to make Quebec City the permanent capital. This plan was vetoed by the Legislative Council which refused to approve funds for construction of parliament buildings at Quebec. In 1857 the Legislative Assembly turned the decision over to Queen Victoria who received representations in this inter-city competition from most major Canadian cities. Governor General Sir Edmund Head confidentially recommended Ottawa writing "Every city is jealous of every other city except Ottawa. The second vote of every place (save, perhaps, Toronto) would be given for Ottawa."² The queen's choice was announced on 17 January 1858 but rather than accepting the decision the Legislative Assembly voted against Ottawa. After a period of political turmoil it was finally decided on 10 December 1859 that Ottawa should be the capital.³

The first major step necessary to ready Ottawa for its new role of capital was to erect structures in which government work could go forward. In the spring of 1860 a public competition was held to choose a design for the new Parliament Buildings, which were constructed despite huge cost overruns and delays.⁴ Approximately 350 civil servants moved to Ottawa and on 25 October 1865 government work commenced there. The first session of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada in Ottawa commenced on 8 June 1866.⁵ Confederation was a prime topic of discussion and one point agreed upon by all was that Ottawa should be capital of the proposed new federation partly due to \$2,600,000 having been spent on the Parliament Buildings.⁶

The governor general is one of the three elements of Parliament, the others being the Senate and the House of Commons. Since the beginning of European settlement in Canada, a governor or governor general represented imperial governments. After Confederation they were empowered to govern according to the wishes of the Canadian prime minister in all internal issues, but until World War I they were still obliged to acknowledge British policy in external affairs. After the Statute of Westminster of 1931 they became the sovereign's personal representatives. In 1947 George VI formally delegated to the governor general all the sovereign's authority in Canada. The governor general summons, prorogues and dissolves Parliament, authorizes treaties, receives and sends ambassadors, commissions officers in the armed forces and gives royal assent to bills that have passed both the House of Commons and the Senate. The governor general is the executive power of the governor-in-council, receiving advice from the Canadian privy council and signing orders-in-council. The Order of Canada and the Order of Military Merit have the governor general as their chancellor. The governor general is the official host to visiting heads of state and can represent Canada abroad.⁷ The office of the governor general is a significant one in Canadian public life, emblematic of the dignity and influence of the Crown. The governor general's work is conducted from the former country estate, Rideau Hall, which has become a vice-regal court.

Rideau Hall was the home of Thomas McKay (1792-1855), an industrialist involved in the lumber business who upon his death in 1855 left an estate of over 1000 acres, including much of what is now the Village of Rockcliffe Park and New Edinburgh.⁸ It seems appropriate that the residence of a lumber baron was developed as Government House at the same time that Ottawa

underwent an equally significant change from a lumber town to the capital of Canada. The presence of Rideau Hall as a glittering vice-regal court is illustrative of a major change in the nature of both the immediate community and of Ottawa.

II ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic Design

The Rideau Hall that was built for Thomas McKay in 1838 was a considerably smaller building constructed of smoothly dressed limestone (Figure 2). In its original form it measured 47 feet by 76 feet and consisted of a two-and-one-half storey, bow fronted central section which was capped by a curved, decorative pediment and flanked by two rectangular wings with galleries enclosed by Doric colonnades. The main entrance was located at the west end of the building while the main or garden facade provided access to gallery and terrace through tall French windows at ground level.⁹ Today, all that remains visible of the original exterior is a corner of the bow front and one wall of the east wing, whose boundaries can be defined by a change in stonework from smooth dressed masonry of 1838 to the rougher stone of the later additions (Figure 3).

The original Rideau Hall would have been regarded as the epitome of elegant living offering many modern amenities such as hot and cold running water, wine cellars, ample servants' quarters, and the almost unheard of luxury of a hot air furnace. The main focus of the ground floor plan was a central oval dining room which was connected by a lift to the kitchens below.¹⁰ Over the years all the original partitions have been removed and almost all the original trim has been stripped away. Only on the

second floor, where the handsome oval drawing room has remained almost completely intact, does one get a glimpse of the original elegance of the interior (Figures 4 and 5). Now used as the royal bedroom it displays a splendid decorative ceiling and cornice. The only other surviving interior feature is a simply designed stairway leading to the attic level (Figure 6).

i) Renovations Phase 1: Early Years as Government House, 1864-1872

The story of Rideau Hall's additions begins in 1864 when it was first leased from the McKay estate at a cost of \$4,000 per year to provide a temporary home for the governor general.¹¹ It was never intended to be a permanent solution as even at this time it was recognized to be completely inadequate for a Government House, being much too small and too remote from Parliament Hill. In 1862 a competition was held to find a design for a new Government House to be located on Nepean Point. The Toronto firm of Cumberland and Storm won first prize for their design (Figure 7) while Thomas Fuller, architect of the Parliament Buildings, took second prize for his submission.¹² This project was immediately postponed, primarily due to the financial strain created by the construction of the new Parliament Buildings.

Although Rideau Hall was rented as a stop-gap until a proper Government House could be built,¹³ it was still necessary to enlarge the building in order to accommodate the governor general's family and staff. In June 1864 the Government of the Province of Canada leased Rideau Hall as the temporary residence for Lord Monck, the governor general. John Page, chief of the Engineering Branch of the Department of Public Works wrote to

24 Sussex Dr.
Prime Minister's

F.P. Rubidge, architect and assistant engineer in that month instructing him "... to ascertain His Excellency's pleasure in regard to the laying out of the grounds and of the arrangements and extent of building accommodation likely to be required."¹⁴ By 1865, plans for a long, two-storey wing punctuated by segmental windows and containing an additional 49 rooms had been drawn up by F.P. Rubidge (Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11). The construction contract was awarded to Mr. Ward of Montreal and Mr. O'Leary of Quebec.¹⁵ This new wing was intentionally designed in a plain functional way for, as explained by F.P. Rubidge, the additions were to be kept "... within as modest a sum as possible and in consideration of the fact that the property was held by the government only for a term of years."¹⁶ Additions of this period included a new conservatory at the south end of the new wing, a cupola over the central pediment of the old building as well as a number of small detached service buildings. In 1870 a porte cochère was added to the entrance on the west end.¹⁷

By 1868 the federal government still had not taken any steps toward building a new Government House and considering the amount of money that had already been spent on improving this rented residence the government felt compelled to purchase the entire property for \$82,000.¹⁸ This decisive act might lead one to suspect that Rideau Hall was by then accepted as the official Government House; however, as will be seen by the subsequent additions of the next 50 years, the government continued to view Rideau Hall as a temporary solution, always hoping to replace it with something better.

Upper Canada was the home for many architects by the 1860s, some being among the most distinguished designers this country has

ever seen. The 1862 competition for a vice-regal palace on Nepean Point resulted in a number of distinguished designs, none of which, of course, were ever constructed. While Canada did not have an extensive tradition of very large country houses there were some built, perhaps the most interesting being the 73 room Trafalgar Castle built in 1859 to the Tudor Gothic designs of Joseph Sheard for Nelson Reynolds at Whitby, Ontario. Sheard briefly practiced in Ottawa between 1863 and 1865 and would undoubtedly have been able to provide a more distinguished design for an addition to Rideau Hall than ultimately was developed.¹⁹ Rideau Hall after its 1865 additions was a 60 room house on an 88 acre estate. Few houses of comparable scale have been built in Canada.

ii) Renovations Phase 2: The Ballroom and Tent Room, 1873 and 1876-78

The enlarged Rideau Hall had one serious drawback as it did not provide a room large enough to accommodate the grand public functions the governor general was expected to host. To meet this need a large ballroom was erected in 1873.²⁰ It was designed as an almost completely separate structure linked to the north-west corner of the 1838 building by a one-storey passageway. As another low-budget effort, it was of a nondescript, box-like design, given a touch of colour in the lighter stonework of the quoining and window surrounds (Figure 12).

During this same period the governor general, Lord Dufferin, was in the habit of giving garden parties in a tent. This became a fairly frequent event and so in 1876 a large wooden structure was hastily erected on the south side of the main door to house this

permanently erected tent room, or tennis court as it was sometimes called. In 1878, however, the Marquis of Lorne and Princess Louise were about to take up residency at Rideau Hall and the government, rather embarrassed by this shabby wooden structure, decided to give it a stone foundation and a refacing of brick to better harmonize with the ballroom.²¹

iii) Renovations Phase 3: The Minto Wing, 1898-1899

For the next 20 years no major building took place at Rideau Hall; however, the issue of a proper Government House was far from dead. Statements such as that expressed by a member of Parliament in the House of Commons in 1886 typify a widely held sentiment: "I may say that I have frequently visited Rideau Hall and I have been ashamed that we had not a more respectable place for our Governor General."²² By the end of the 19th century criticism of Rideau Hall became more frequent and more vicious. One rather eloquent description reputedly came from a Chicago journalist who stated:

It is a disgrace - from year to year it has been patched and added to till now it is an inconvenient old barracks, incumbering an acre or more of the earth's surface and covering nearly one hundred rooms under its leaking roof. A destructive fire is needed badly.²³

The government continued to be immune to these unkind cuts and when an addition was required in 1898²⁴ for the new governor general, Lord Minto, and his large household, the old makeshift approach prevailed. The Minto Wing, which was tacked on to the building's east end had a square, box-like design such as might have been used for warehouses or functional military buildings across the country (Figures 13 and 14). Lord Minto raised no

objection to this structure as he had assumed it to be a stop-gap until a new Government House was built in Rockcliffe Park with Rideau Hall becoming the home of the National Gallery.²⁵

While the governor generalship of Canada was a prestigious post enjoyed to a greater or lesser extent by a number of British noblemen, the universal initial reaction to Rideau Hall was one of dismay. Certainly in terms of the accommodations, Ottawa and Rideau Hall were considered a hardship post. Many of the governors general had previously held colonial postings in India, Australia, New Zealand or Africa, virtually all of which offered rather splendid vice-regal palaces, as opposed to the comfortable but unimposing Rideau Hall.

iv) Renovations Phase 4

The next phase of construction began in 1906 with a small addition to the east end of the 1865 wing intended to contain the governor general's study on the main floor.²⁶ The bow fronted design, which echoes the original bow front, represents the first attempt to design with any sense of overall planning (Figure 13). An addition was also made to the north face of the house at this time to extend the dining room (Figure 15).

v) Renovations Phase 5

Even by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the hope for a new Government House was still alive. In the House of Commons in 1912 one member enquired of the government if

they had taken into consideration the possibility or the propriety of providing a new residence for the Governor General. Every year a considerable vote is

taken for improvements at Rideau Hall, and it seems to me that enough has been spent in small amounts from year to year in my memory to have built a very magnificent building.²⁷

By this time however, the government had other plans which would transform this rambling structure into a grand Edwardian structure. This was to be achieved by linking the ballroom to the tent room with a grand pedimented front, thus creating an almost balanced composition. The entrance used at the time was demolished (Figures 16 and 17), and a new facade built in 1914, a very plain design articulated by shallow unadorned pilasters (Figures 18 and 19).²⁸ This form fails to provide a strong monumental focus that might have held the composition together. This entrance front is the characteristic view of Rideau Hall familiar to most Canadians.

vi) Renovations Phase 6: 1913-1986

Numerous alterations to subsidiary elements of the building such as greenhouses (1924-26) and verandahs (1927-28) have occurred in this period but there have been no major building campaigns. The most recent exterior alteration to Rideau Hall was the construction in 1982 of the Princess Anne entrance for the disabled (Figure 20). A handsome addition on Rideau Hall's north facade, it sensitively blends with the structure.

Functional Design

Rideau Hall was originally designed as a gracious country villa of moderate size. Subsequent enormous additions constructed in several campaigns extended the house in a haphazard fashion. Awkwardly connected one to the other, the additions sprawl incoherently about the original Rideau Hall, completely engulfing it. The initial 49 room 1865 addition

contained no major reception rooms, a lack which led to the construction of the 1873 ballroom and the 1876 tent room, both of which were arbitrarily sited and awkwardly connected to the house (Figure 21). Later attempts to regularize the appearance of the house with a monumental entrance front finally allowed for a proper foyer and large sitting room, and helped to provide somewhat clearer circulation patterns.

Craftsmanship and Materials

Rideau Hall is primarily constructed of brick and stone. The surviving sections of the original house reveal high quality materials and delicate detailing much in contrast to the pedestrian nature of the 1865 addition. The tent room is of brick, stuccoed and scored to replicate the stone of the monumental pedimented entrance front. Clumsily matched and finished materials have contributed to the deterioration of some of the building fabric.

Designer

Rideau Hall was constructed in 1838 to the designs of an unknown architect. It has been postulated that McKay, as a mason, had sufficient interest and expertise in building to design the house himself, possibly based upon a knowledge of designs for an English country villa by Sir John Soane.²⁹ The house as we know it today is the product of the labours of several generations of architects from the Department of Public Works. F.P. Rubidge, who designed the original 1865 addition had been hired in 1841 by the Board of Works of the United Canadas and in the new federal Department of Public Works became architect and assistant engineer.³⁰ By 1899 when the Minto Wing was added the Chief Architect's Branch under David Ewart was a substantially larger body and busy with major building projects across the country and in Ottawa. As utilitarian additions to

the rear of the house the 1899 and 1906 sections of Rideau Hall may well have been assigned to junior designers. Ewart very likely would have been personally involved with the major 1913 entrance front as it radically altered the nature of the house's appearance.

II ENVIRONMENT

Rideau Hall was built in 1838 as the heart of a large rural estate, and although it has undergone many additions the 88 acre estate has retained much of its original character. The grounds have been altered over the years just as the house has been altered to suit the needs and tastes of its occupants (Figure 22). During McKay's years at Rideau Hall ornamental wooded grounds were developed which included "a serpentine drive and elegant hedges of cedar."³¹ From the outset the grounds to the north side of the house were primarily for service buildings, a land use which prevails to the present day, while the southern area of the grounds was given over to flower gardens and a bowling green.³² The northern area of the grounds has always been left in a relatively natural state and has been the site of a large toboggan slide and ice rinks (Figure 23). An early photograph (Figure 9) of the southern gardens shows them to be little changed to the present day (Figures 24 and 25). Also to the south of the house are cricket grounds which have existed since the 1860s. Immediately following the major addition of the grand pedimented entrance front in 1913 the grounds were significantly altered by the removal of large numbers of coniferous trees and their replacement by deciduous trees to better replicate an English park (Figures 26 and 27).³³

Rideau Hall was the first building in the area, and in conjunction with its large grounds it can be said to have established the present distinguished character of the neighbourhood. The remainder of the land immediately outside the Rideau Hall grounds was subdivided by Thomas McKay's heirs in 1864 and became the neighbourhoods of the Village of Rockcliffe Park and New Edinburgh. The cachet which these neighbourhoods have enjoyed is at least partly due to their proximity to Government House.

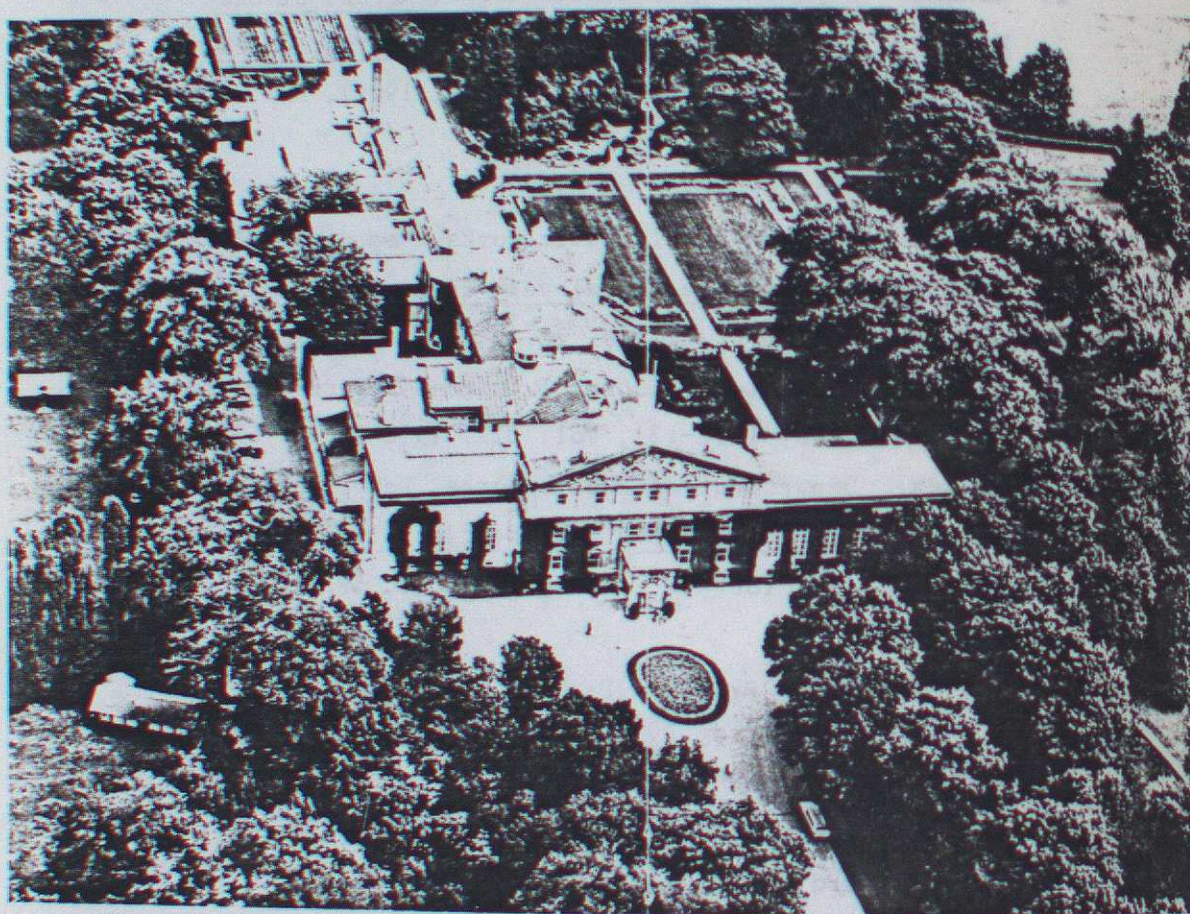
Purchased by the government of Canada in 1868 as the residence of the governor general, Rideau Hall has come to symbolize one aspect of government in the same way that the Houses of Parliament symbolize another aspect. Rideau Hall and its gracious grounds are a prominent landmark in the national capital (Figure 28).

Endnotes

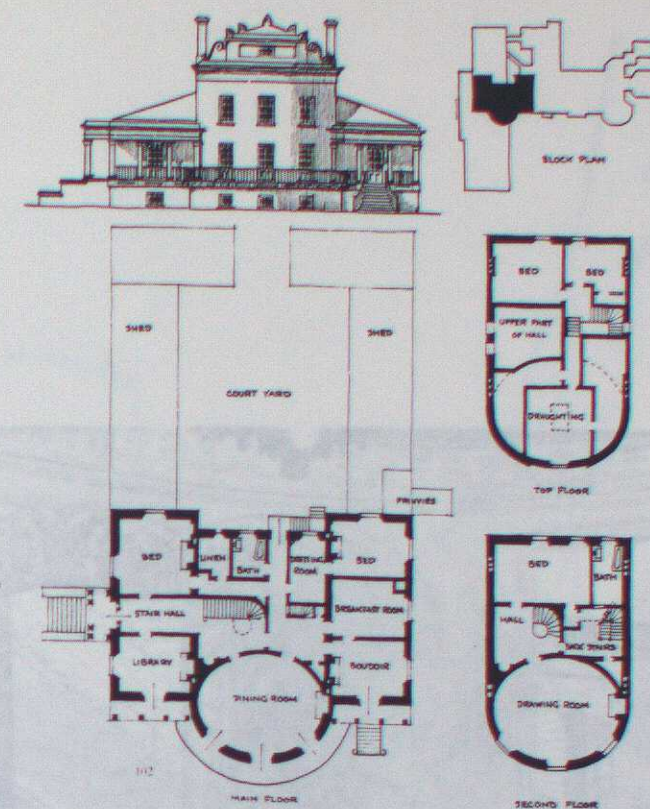
- 1 Shirley E. Woods, Jr. Ottawa, The Capital of Canada (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1980), p. 120.
- 2 Ibid., p. 121.
- 3 Ibid., p. 122.
- 4 Ibid., p. 124.
- 5 Sanda Gwyn; The Private Capital: Ambition and Love in the Age of Macdonald and Laurier (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1984), p. 35.
- 6 Shirley E. Woods, Jr., op. cit., p. 126.
- 7 "Governor-General," The Canadian Encyclopedia, Volume II, pp. 757-758.
- 8 Village of Rockcliffe Park LACAC, Walking in the Village of Rockcliffe Park (Ottawa: Village of Rockcliffe Park, 1982), p. 10.

- 9 R.H. Hubbard, Rideau Hall: An Illustrated History of Government House, Ottawa (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967, p. 15).
- 10 Ibid., p. 13.
- 11 Canada. Department of Public Works, General Report of the Commissioner of Public Works for the Year Ending 30 June 1867 (Ottawa: Hunter, Rose and Company 1868), p. 245.
- 12 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 16.
- 13 Canada. Canada Commission of Public Works, Annual Report for the last year ending 30 June 1864 (Quebec: Hunter, Rose and Co., 1865), p. 48.
- 14 Public Archives Canada (hereafter PAC), RG11, Department of Public Works, Vol. 425, Subject 1028. Letter, John Page to F.P. Rubidge, 18 June 1864.
- 15 Canada. Department of Public Works, General Report of the Commissioner of Public Works for the Year Ending 30 June 1867 (Ottawa: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1868), p. 150.
- 16 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 18.
- 17 Ibid., p. 18.
- 18 Canada. Department of Public Works, General Report from 30 June 1867 to 1 July 1882 (Ottawa: Maclean Roger, 1883), p. 180.
- 19 Marion MacRae and Anthony Adamson, The Ancestral Roof: Domestic Architecture of Upper Canada (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Ltd., 1963), pp. 174-179; and Stephen Beszedits, Eminent Toronto Architects of the Past: Their Lives and Works (Toronto: B.L. Information Services, 1983), p. 41; and Mitchell and Co.'s County of Carleton and Ottawa City Directory for 1864-65 (Toronto: W.C. Chewett and Co., 1864), p. 160.
- 20 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 33.
- 21 Ibid., p. 38.

- 22 Canada. Parliament, House of Commons Debates (Ottawa: Maclean Roger, 1886), Vol. XXI, 1886, p. 801.
- 23 Florence Hamilton Randal, "Rideau Hall - Past and Present," The Canadian Magazine, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (December 1898), p. 149.
- 24 Canada. Department of Public Works, Report of the Minister of Public Works for the fiscal year ended 30 June, 1899 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1901), App. III, p. 15.
- 25 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 102.
- 26 Canada. Department of Public Works, Report of Minister of Public Works for the fiscal year ended 30 June 1906 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson), App. III, p. 22.
- 27 Canada. Parliament, House of Commons Debates (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1912-13), Vol. CIX, 1912-13, p. 6232.
- 28 Canada. Department of Public Works, Report of the Minister of Public Works for the fiscal year ending 31 March 1914 (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1915), App. III, p. 34.
- 29 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 10.
- 30 Margaret Archibald, By Federal Design: The Chief Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works, 1881-1914 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1983), p. 3.
- 31 R.H. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 15.
- 32 Ibid., p. 16.
- 33 R.H. Hubbard, Rideau Hall: An illustrated history of Government House, Ottawa from Victorian times to the present day (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), p. 136.



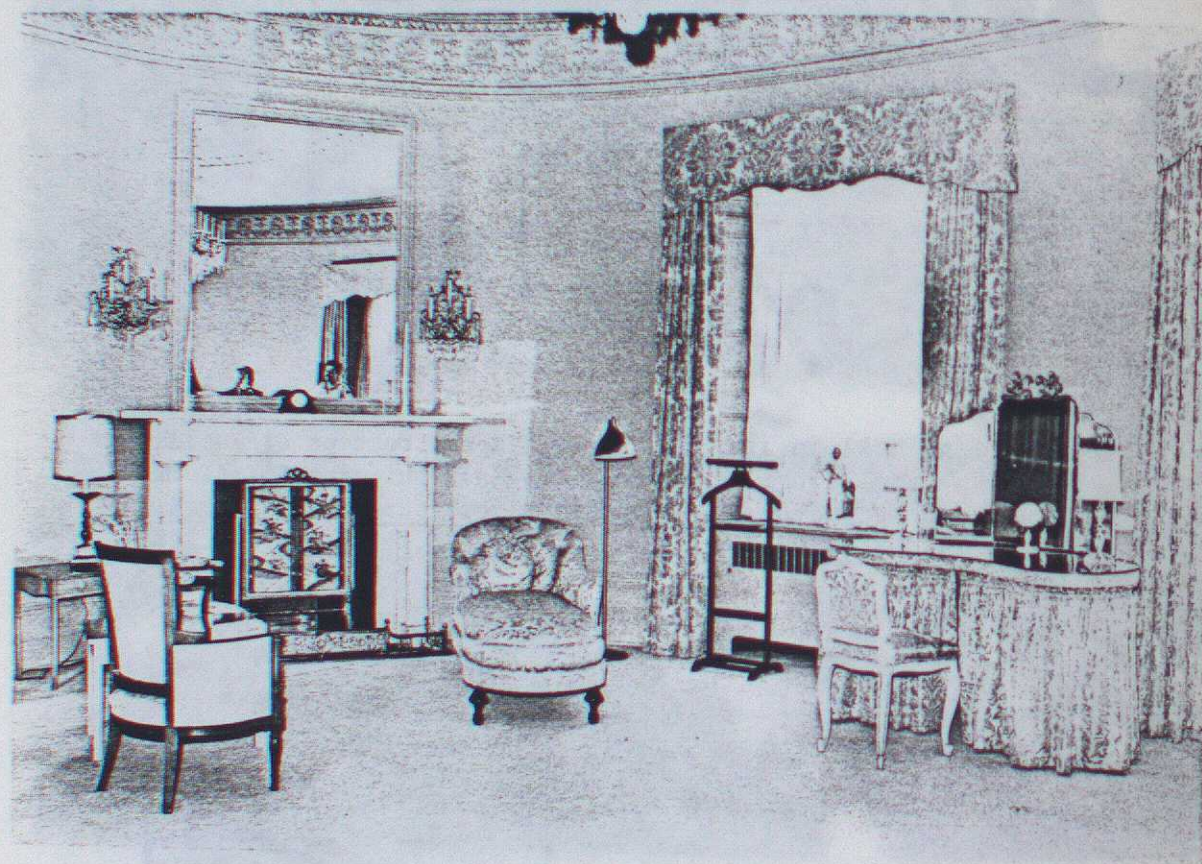
1 Rideau Hall, Ottawa, Ontario; built 1838, additions 1865 to 1913, Department of Public Works. (Government House, 1977.)



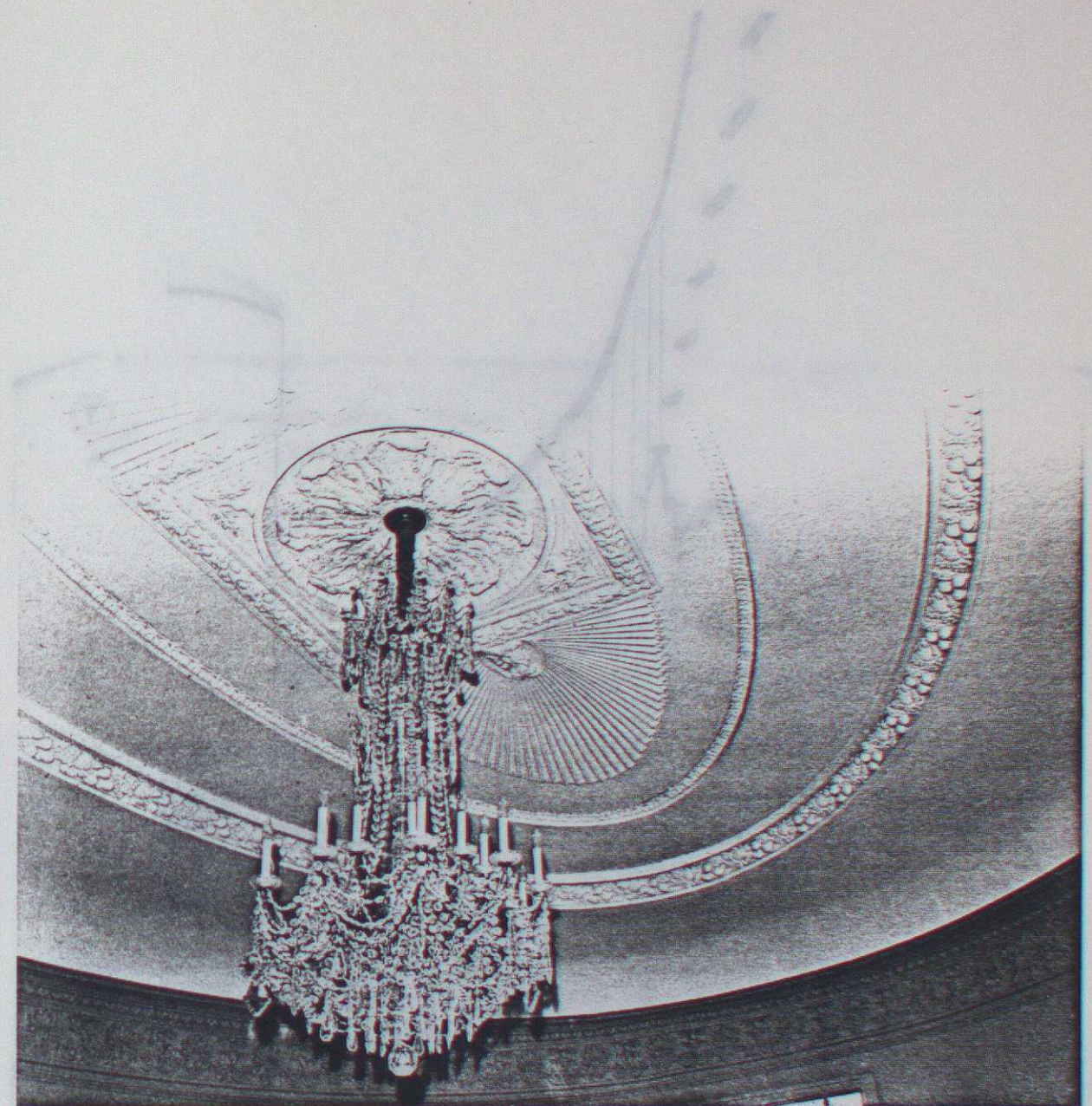
2 Rideau Hall in its 1838 state, reconstruction elevation and plan, including location of original building in relation to present structure. (Photograph reproduced from R.H. Hubbard, Rideau Hall [Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967], p. 13.)



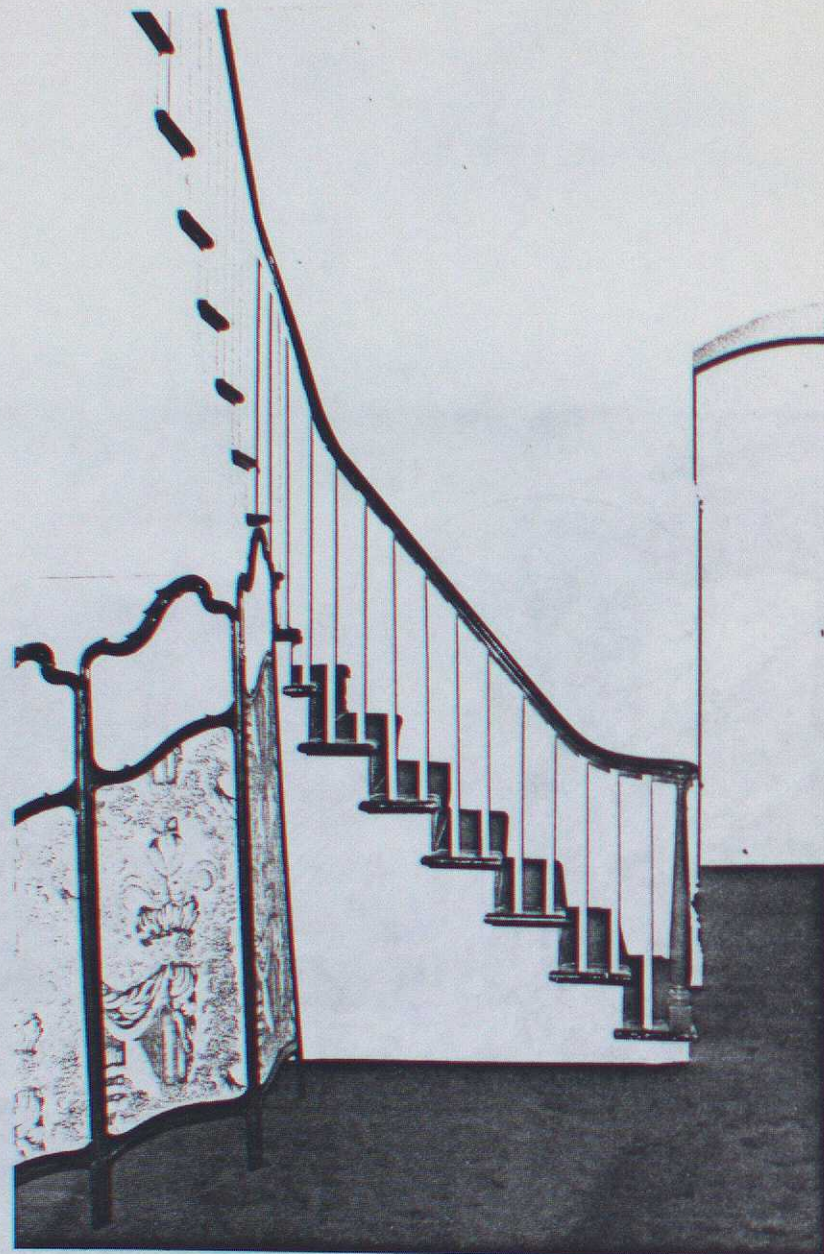
3 Rideau Hall, south western elevation showing original bow-fronted section. (Parks, AHD, M. Trépanier, 1986.)



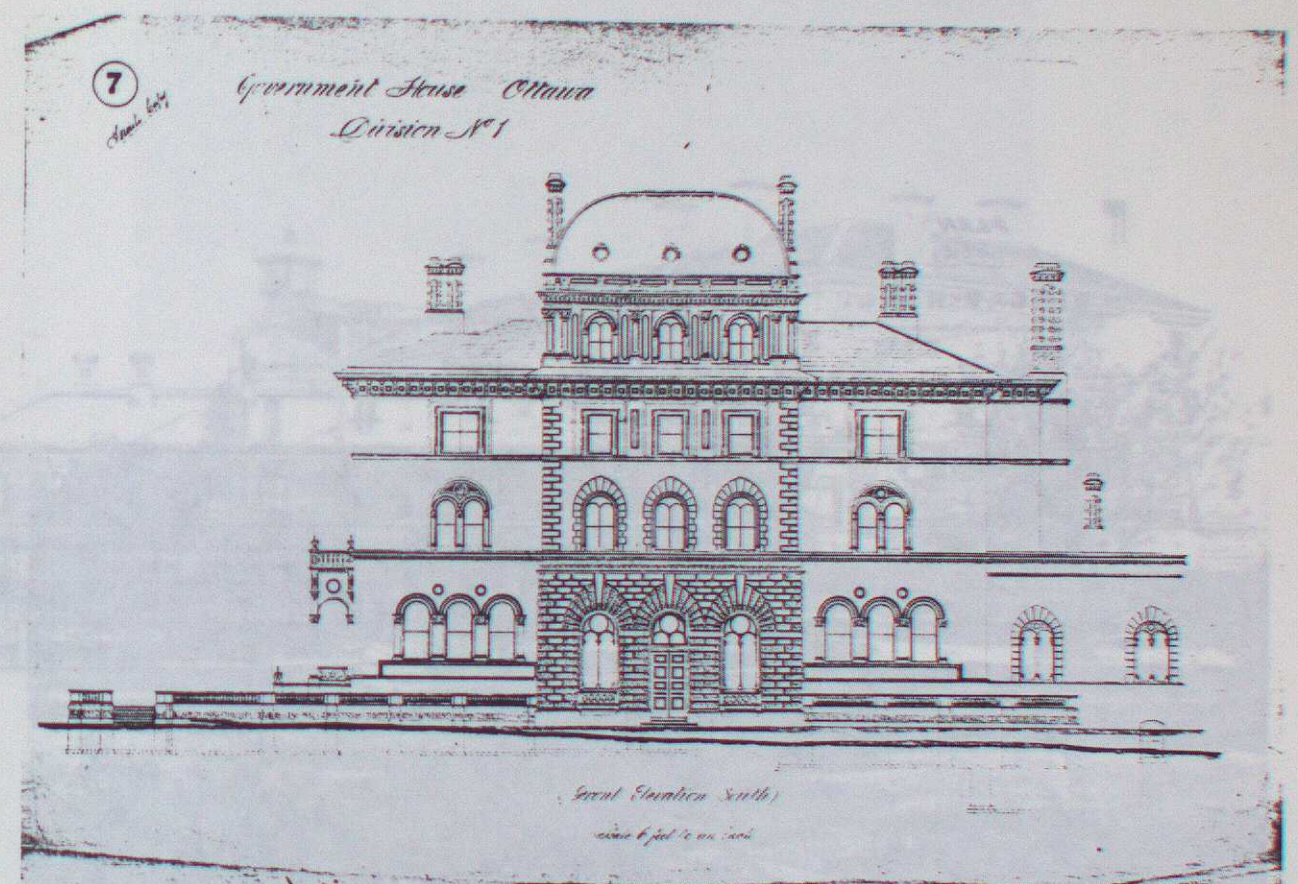
4 Oval drawing room of 1838. (Parks, CIHB, 1976.)



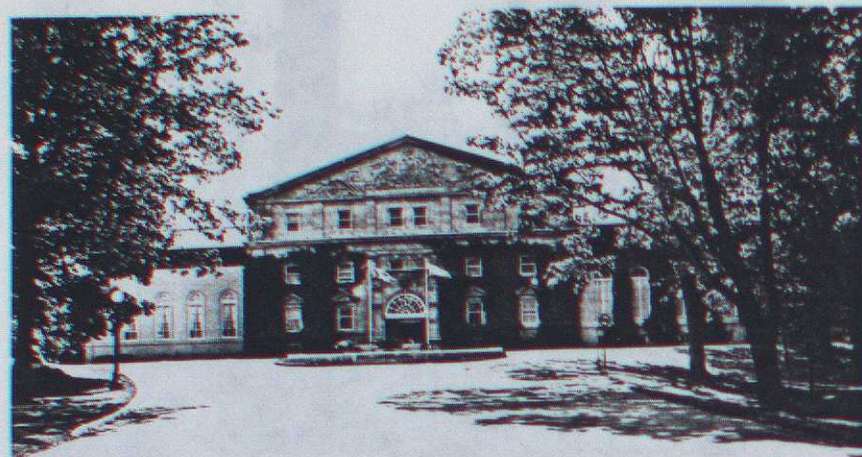
5 Oval drawing room of 1838, ceiling detail. (Parks, CIHB, 1976.)



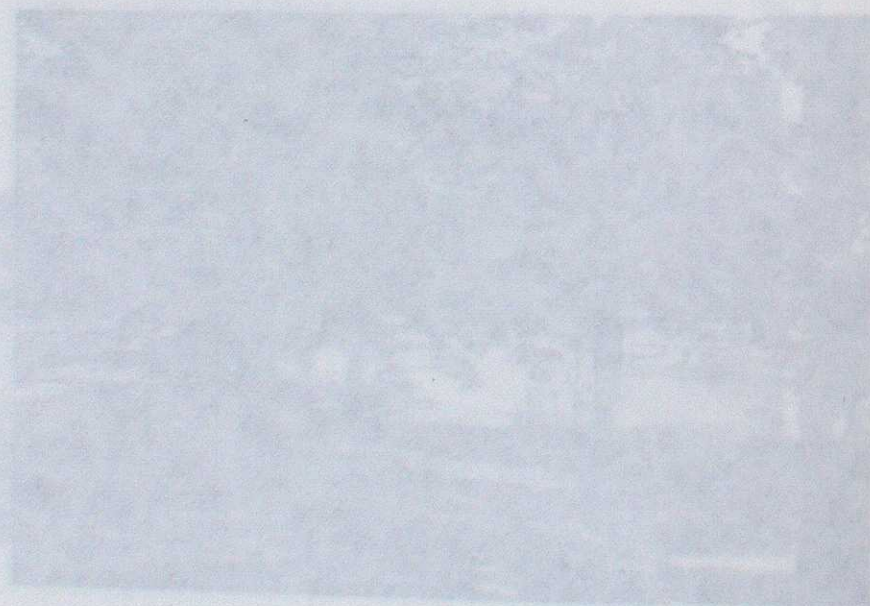
6 Attic stairway, 1838. (Parks, CIHB, 1976.)



7 Proposed Government House, Ottawa; elevation drawing 1862, Cumberland and Storm, architects. (Archives of Ontario.)



28 Rideau Hall in 1986. (Parks, AHD, M. Trépanier, 1986.)



28 Rideau Hall in 1986. (Parks, AHD, M. Trépanier, 1986.)

FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE

BUILDING REPORT 85-67

TITLE: Prime Minister's Residence
24 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario.

SOURCE: Jacqueline Adell, Architectural History Division

INTRODUCTION

The prime minister's official residence at 24 Sussex Drive in Ottawa is a large two-and-a-half storey stone house situated in a beautiful 3.98 acre site overlooking the Ottawa River. It was built as a fashionable, Gothic Revival urban villa in 1867-68 by Joseph Merrill Currier, a prosperous lumber manufacturer.¹ In 1902 the house was sold to another lumber manufacturer, W. C. Edwards, who made substantial alterations to the plan and appearance of the house in 1907-09.² The property remained in the hands of the Edwards family until 1943, at which date it was expropriated by the federal government. Under the direction of the Department of Public Works the house was remodelled for a second time in 1949-51 to serve as the official residence of the prime minister. It was given a more formal appearance typical of many large urban houses of the 1940s and 1950s (Figures 1-8).

24 Sussex Dr.
Prime Minister's
Residence

From 1943 to December, 1985, 24 Sussex Drive was maintained by Public Works Canada. In December, 1985, ownership of this and three other official residences in the National Capital Region (Rideau Hall, 7 Rideau Gate and Stormoway) was transferred to the National Capital Commission. On the advice of the Official Residence Council, a committee set up by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1984 to oversee the maintenance and repair of the official residences, the National Capital Commission has asked the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office to evaluate 24 Sussex Drive for its architectural and historical significance.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

Twenty-four Sussex Drive was designated as the official residence of the Prime Minister of Canada in 1950.³ The following year, Louis St. Laurent became the first prime minister to live in the house. Until then, previous prime ministers had either purchased or rented their own accommodation during their terms of office. The need for an official residence had, however, long been recognized. When, for example, Earnscliffe, the Ottawa home of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, was offered for sale in 1930, an unsuccessful petition was made to Prime Minister R. B. Bennett to purchase the house on behalf of the Canadian government for the purpose.⁴ At the time of its expropriation in 1943, it was suggested that 24 Sussex Drive would also make a suitable official residence. No action was then taken, however, possibly because the prime minister of the day, William Lyon Mackenzie King, owned an elegant Second Empire house on Laurier Avenue and therefore had no personal need for such a residence. It was not until November, 1948, when Louis St. Laurent was appointed prime minister and moved from Québec to Ottawa, that the federal government decided the time

had come to acquire a permanent home for the prime minister. Two years previously, 24 Sussex Drive had been leased to the Australian High Commission. When the lease expired in 1949, the house was chosen to be the official residence.⁵

Until the 1930s, the east end of Sussex Street (as Sussex Drive used to be called) consisted, on the north side, of a few large residential properties interspersed with industrial buildings, working class houses and other undistinguished structures. A change in the appearance of the area occurred in 1930, with the purchase and restoration by the British High Commission of Earnscliffe, the attractive Gothic Revival villa on a 2.38 acre site on the north side of Sussex Street west of the Rideau Falls (Figure 9). The following year, France purchased the Blackburn property, a 2.31 acre site on the east side of the falls. It demolished the house on the site and began the construction of an imposing embassy building (Figure 10). A further .81 acres of land sandwiched between this property and the Edwards property was acquired for the French government in 1937.⁶ The Edwards residence became the last private property along the river between the Rideau Falls and the Governor General's residence at Rideau Hall.

The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted Canada's trade relations with Europe. To compensate for its lost markets, Canada established diplomatic relations with Latin America, beginning with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Venezuela. At the same time, it exchanged High Commissioners with the Commonwealth countries of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. As the war progressed, its relationship with its European allies intensified, causing several European countries to establish an Embassy in Ottawa.⁷ The arrival of so many ambassadors in the city created a demand for large properties. In 1940, for example, nine countries were

represented by high commissioners or ministers. This number increased to 11 in 1941 and 18 by 1942. 1943 saw the first ambassador in Ottawa and by the end of 1944 there were 23 ambassadors, high commissioners or ministers in the city.⁸ No doubt, the knowledge that many of the larger Ottawa residences were being purchased by foreign governments, coupled with the fact that the Edwards property was the last residential property on the north side of Sussex Street, led to the 1943 federal government decision to expropriate. With the objective of expanding the capital's parkland, the government had been steadily acquiring property around the Rideau Falls between the French embassy and the British High Commissioner's residence. With the purchase of the Edwards property, it was in a position to control the remaining development of Sussex Street, from the Royal Canadian Mint to Rideau Hall.

The federal government's interest in Sussex Street was related to the Federal District Commission's overall plan for the beautification of Ottawa and the surrounding region. The Commission, the forerunner of the National Capital Commission, was particularly active during the tenure of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who personally invited the French urban planner Jacques Gréber to come to Ottawa and advise on the future development of the district. Plans for the capital included turning Sussex Street into a scenic driveway. They also prompted the government to acquire the land around the Rideau Falls and contributed to the later decision to purchase 24 Sussex Drive.⁹

Expropriation of the Edwards property was not a straightforward matter. The government originally offered \$125,000 for the house, the land on which it stood, a stone garage, a tool house west of the residence and two stone buildings facing Sussex Street. The latter buildings comprised a former coach and stable which had been

converted into a small dwelling known as 10 Sussex Street (Figure 6), and a small house known as 26 Sussex Street.¹⁰ Gordon Cameron Edwards countered the government's offer by asking for \$261,190. The dispute was eventually resolved by the Exchequer Court of Canada in 1946 when Edwards was awarded \$140,000 for his property and \$7,319.95 for costs. The final cost to the federal government after renovations was \$557,319.86.¹¹

Person/Event

Each of the first three owners of 24 Sussex Drive has played a significant role in the political and economic life of the community. It is a measure of their position in the community that each was elected to the House of Commons. Joseph Merrill Currier, the builder of 24 Sussex Drive, entered politics in the 1860s and was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1863. In 1867 he became the member of parliament for the riding of Ottawa in the first Dominion Parliament. As the local federal politician, Currier entertained several important people at the house, including Sir John and Lady Macdonald, who attended the Currier's housewarming party, and Prince Arthur of Connaught, later Governor General of Canada, who was entertained at a lavish ball in February 1870. A contemporary report of the evening recorded the scene:

Lady Young's reception on the 15th was followed by the ball given by Mrs Currier and our own worthy and much respected Member of the 16th, in honour of the Prince. Mr. Currier's establishment is not on a very extensive scale, but all that was possible was done to render the occasion worthy of the hosts and of their distinguished guest....But with all, Ottawa has never before, at the hands of a private individual, presented an entertainment excelling this in elegance and comfort and enjoyment....A temporary ball-room was erected, which was fitted

up and ornamented with a chaste and beautiful simplicity, though not without all the elaboration that good taste could supply....The ball-room was bright with gay and varied uniforms, and the tout ensemble presented as pretty and charming a picture as it is often possible to behold.

The generous host and hostess were unceasing in their exertions to promote the comfort and enjoyment of their company....feel assured, that the wines and refreshments were of the choicest and most costly that good taste and liberality could provide.¹²

The second owner of 24 Sussex Drive, William Cameron Edwards, was elected member of Parliament for the riding of Russell in 1891. He served his constituency for nine years until his defeat in 1900. In 1903 Sir Wilfred Laurier appointed him to the Senate. Gordon Cameron Edwards, who inherited the house in 1923, entered politics in 1926 and was elected member of Parliament for the riding of Ottawa, the same seat held by Joseph Merrill Currier 60 years earlier.¹³

Since its acquisition by the federal government, 24 Sussex Drive has been home to six Canadian prime ministers: Louis St. Laurent, Lester B. Pearson, John Diefenbaker, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney. As such, it has been the location for many political and social events relating to contemporary federal politics.

Local Development

Each of the first three private owners of 24 Sussex Drive was a prominent leader in the lumber industry and each played a significant role in the economic development of the community. The location of the house, overlooking the Ottawa River near Rideau

Falls, reflects its historic relationship with the industry. Joseph Merrill Currier was one of a group of enterprising Americans who came to Bytown in the 1850s to develop the lumber industry around the Chaudière Falls.¹⁴ In association with J. C. Blasdel, Currier constructed a large mill there in 1852. The following year, however, they sold their holdings and Currier rented a lumber mill at the Rideau Falls which had previously belonged to Thomas McKay.¹⁵ He expanded his business interests in 1857, and in partnership with Moss Kent Dickinson he constructed a flour mill in Manotick, Ontario. With the boom in the lumber industry in the mid-1860s, Currier became a very wealthy man. But while he had made a fortune, his personal life had been difficult. He lost two wives and three of his four children in the 15 years he had spent in Ottawa. He built 24 Sussex Drive with his third wife Hannah Wright and called it "'Gorphwysfa" a Welsh word meaning "place of peace". He lived in the house until his death in 1884 at the age of 64.

Like Joseph Merrill Currier, William Cameron Edwards the second owner of 24 Sussex Drive, owed his financial fortune to the lumber industry. He began his business career in 1863 working with his father's firm of Cameron & Edwards.¹⁶ Within five years he had established his own firm, W. C. Edwards & Company, in Rockland, Ontario. By 1891 he also owned a considerable amount of industrial property on the east and west sides of the Rideau Falls. When his properties on the west side of the falls burned down shortly after 1891, he consolidated his holdings on the east side. These included, a flour mill, a sawmill and a wood manufacturing company consisting of a sash and door factory, a planing mill and a mill for shaping hardwood. At one point his mills produced more sawn lumber than almost any other factory in the country. With the decline of the industry in the early years of the 20th century, Edwards consolidated his holdings into one large mill complex (Figure 11).

He sold his holdings in 1920 to the Riodan Pulp & Paper Company.¹⁷ William C. Edwards died 1922. Gordon Cameron Edwards inherited his uncle's house in 1924. He followed in his uncle's and grandfather's footsteps and made his own fortune in the lumber trade. He remained in the house until 1946, the year of his death. The Edwards name is still an important name in the Ottawa business and social community.

ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic Design

The present appearance of 24 Sussex Drive bears no resemblance to the house that Joseph Merrill Currier constructed in 1867, but shades of the original house can still be detected in the general size and ground plan of the present building, as well as in the use of stone as the main building material. No known illustrations exist of the house at this early date, but a contemporary description allows speculation on its appearance.¹⁸ "It was built of dark grey stones faced with Gloucester limestone and roofed with tin. The style of the building is Gothic and the design chaste and elegant."¹⁹ From this description, Currier's house was probably typical of the large houses built by Ottawa's prominent families in the 1860s. Owners of the more expensive houses often took advantage of an abundance of good local stone and the influx of skilled masons who had been drawn to Bytown in the 1830s by the construction of the Rideau Canal. The choice of the Gothic Revival style would have been in keeping with the architectural fashion of the day and no doubt influenced by the recently constructed Parliament Buildings. The house that Currier built may well have resembled J. R. Booth's residence on the Richmond Road (Figure 12). Certain features of Currier's house, such as the steep gable with its Gothic Revival trim, recorded in photographs taken of the house in the 1940s, support this contention (Figure 7).

When W. C. Edwards altered the house in 1907-09, its Gothic Revival appearance was radically changed.²⁰ To the principal facade he added a round, two-storey tower crowned by a steep, conical roof, an oriel window at the second level above the entrance way and a prominent porte cochère. These additional features gave the house a "chateausque" appearance, one of a number of popular domestic styles at the turn of the century, and the style chosen by the Grand Trunk Railway for its new hotel, the Chateau Laurier, then under construction in Ottawa (Figure 7).

The 1949 remodelling of 24 Sussex Drive was precipitated by the need to adapt the house to the requirements of an official residence. It included the creation of a series of large formal rooms on the ground floor and the addition of a new two-storey kitchen wing to the east side of the house. The remodelling afforded the Department of Public Works the opportunity to change the appearance of the exterior. These changes involved stripping the house of its eclectic "chateausque" and Gothic Revival features, including the removal of the projecting tower, the oriel window, porte cochère, and all the remaining Gothic Revival trim. Interior planning necessitated the removal of the main entranceway from one side of the projecting frontispiece to the other. In the process, the door was reduced in size and given a simple classical surround, surmounted by the Canadian coat of arms. All the windows on the principal facade and most of those on the secondary facades were replaced with white, multipaned sash windows. Dormer windows of a similar style were added to the roof. The roof, in turn, was built up and two new chimney stacks were added to balance the composition. The house still has an eclectic appearance and its massing is still varied despite the concerted effort to attain a more contained, rectangular ground plan. Nevertheless, it has a clean-cut appearance, which has been achieved by reducing the variety

of features on the facade and, with the exception of the coat of arms above the door, by removing all embellishments. The principal features of the present facade are its attractive horizontal roof lines and the rows of rectangular, shuttered windows. Both features serve to tie the various parts of the principal facade together to give the house unity and balance. This is particularly true when the house is studied from a distance, the normal vantage point.

The conventional appearance of the house no doubt reflects both the conservative leanings of the chief architects office at the Department of Public Works and the generally conservative state of domestic architecture, in Canada as elsewhere, from the 1920s to the early 1950s. After the First World War, a taste for a variety of domestic architectural styles emerged, which, generally speaking, could be divided into two groups - those based upon the picturesque styles of the late 19th century and those which chose the classically inspired styles of the early part of the century. Of the latter group, the Georgian Revival was by far the most popular style in the period between the wars. Certain details of 24 Sussex Drive, such as the style of its windows and the treatment of its doorways, suggest that the architects may have had this general style in mind when they reconstructed the exterior in 1949.

Several houses contemporary with the reconstruction of 24 Sussex Drive adopted the Georgian Revival style in neighboring Rockcliffe Park Village (Figure 13). In the immediate vicinity of the prime minister's residence, an example of the popular style can be seen at 7 Rideau Gate (purchased by the Department of Public Works in 1966 and now the Official Government of Canada Guest House) which received its "Georgian" appearance when it was remodelled in 1934 (Figure 14). The South African Embassy, at 5 Rideau Gate, chose a contemporary version of the style for its 1947 stone extension facing

24 Sussex Drive which, in turn, is not dissimilar to the formal embassy building constructed by France in 1936-39 (Figures 10 and 15). No doubt the scale and general appearance of these buildings had an influence on the appearance of 24 Sussex Drive.

Functional Design

When it was decided to make 24 Sussex Drive the prime minister's official residence, it became necessary to modernize the building and adapt its design to serve as both an official residence and a family home. This entailed the creation of a series of large formal rooms on the ground floor, and the addition of a new two-storey kitchen wing to the east side of the house, cloak room facilities and an elevator (Figures 16-18). As the original location of the kitchen blocked the view of the river, the Department of Public Works decided to take the opportunity to rearrange the floor plans and orient the house towards the river. The principal rooms were arranged along the north and west side of the house and a picture gallery removed and replaced by an outdoor terrace (which was enclosed at a later date). The central north-south corridor contained the entrance foyer, the principal foyer, with access to the dining and living room and a view through the sun room of the river. To complete the design, a handsome curved staircase was placed in the main foyer (Figure 18). Only minor alterations have been made to the house since 1951.

Craftsmanship and Materials

In the opinion of Public Works Canada, the house was originally well constructed of good materials and is in a generally good state of repairs.²¹

Designer

The original architect of 24 Sussex Drive was Joseph Merrill Currier's brother, J. M. Currier, who came from Springfield

Massachusetts.²² The 1949 alterations were carried out by the Toronto architectural firm of Allward and Gouinlock, under the supervision of the Department of Public Works. Preliminary plans drawn up by the department indicate that Public Works gave strong direction to the remodelling of the house (Figure 16).

The firm of Allward and Gouinlock was established in Toronto in 1935. Initially the partnership consisted of Hugh L. Allward, the son of Walter S. Allward, the sculptor, and G. Roper Gouinlock, the son of the Toronto architect, George Gouinlock. The majority of the practice in the 1930s and the early 1940s consisted of residential buildings, many of which were situated in York Mills, near Toronto. With the exception of a few modern designs, these houses were generally executed in either a Georgian Revival or Colonial Revival style. The firm made a name for itself after the Second World War with a series of important commissions. Chief among these were: the Sunnybrook Hospital, Toronto (1949); the Massey Harris Office Building, King Street West, Toronto (ca. 1948); the Mechanical and Engineering Building, University of Toronto (1949), one of the first modern buildings constructed in Toronto; the Maclean Hunter building, Toronto (1949); the East Memorial Building, Ottawa (1955); the School of Dentistry, University of Toronto (1959) and the Administration Building, Ford Motor Company, Oakville (1963). Hugh Allward died in 1971 and George Roper Gouinlock died in 1979. The firm continues to practise under the name of Allward and Gouinlock.²³

Site

The outstanding feature of the property is its location and the view it affords. Few Ottawa properties can rival it. Situated in 3.98 acres of land, with approximately 720 feet of river frontage rising steeply to 90 feet above the Ottawa River, the house commands a

magnificent view up and down the river and across to the Gatineau Hills (Figures 19-22). The property has been carefully maintained and protected over the years from the encroachment of industrial development around the Rideau Falls. Since its acquisition by the federal government, the grounds provide an attractive site particularly in the spring time when the large beds of tulips and daffodils are in bloom.

Setting

When 24 Sussex Drive was expropriated by the federal government in 1943, the road was not the attractive scenic drive it has become today. The British High Commission had purchased Earnscliffe in 1930 and spent a considerable amount of money to improve both the house and the site. France had also acquired the Blackburn property and constructed an imposing stone house on the site, but the rest of the street from Earnscliffe to Rideau Gate was unremarkable. In the early 1940s, a disused fire station stood diagonally across from the French embassy, the buildings on John Street at its Sussex Street end had fallen into disrepair, and the houses along the south side of Sussex Street between Stanley and MacKay streets were unremarkable.²⁴

Despite its natural beauty, the land from the west side of the Rideau Falls to the boundary of Rockcliffe Park Village had been the site of considerable industrial activity since the 1830s. Some mill buildings belonging to the former W. C. Edwards Company were still standing when the government purchased 24 Sussex Drive. Through a sustained effort on the part of the Federal District Commission and its successor the National Capital Commission, the area has gradually become an attractive setting of grand houses and parkland. The construction of the new Ottawa City Hall in 1958 and the Lester B. Pearson Building for the Department of External

Affairs in 1968-73 has added a modern note to the area. Together with the attractive village of New Edinburgh, they serve to enhance the setting around 24 Sussex Drive.

Landmark

Twenty-four Sussex Drive has been the official residence of the Canadian prime ministers for 36 years, and time has given it an important sense of permanence. The house itself is undistinguished, but its size and general appearance are appropriate for the home of Canada's head of government. Its magnificent site overlooking the Ottawa River, on the ceremonial route between the Governor General's Residence and the Parliament Buildings, makes the property an important symbolic and visual landmark.

Endnotes

- 1 "The Progress of Ottawa, Part 1," Ottawa Citizen, 24 November 1867.
- 2 Canada. Exchequer Court Reports (1946), The King v. Edwards (hereafter cited as The King v. Edwards), p. 323.
- 3 Maureen McTeer, Residences: Homes of Canada's Leaders (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.), p. 23.
- 4 "24 Sussex: Who Owns it?" Citizen, (Ottawa), 15 February 1975, p. 21.
- 5 Maureen McTeer, op. cit.

- 6 Information on the size, cost and purchase date of Earnscliffe and the Blackburn property is contained in The King v. Edwards, op. cit., p. 321.
- 7 In conversation with Donald Page, historian, Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, 2 May 1986.
- 8 The King v. Edwards, pp. 316-317.
- 9 Canada. Parliament. House of Commons, House of Commons Debates (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1947), pp. 428-429.
- 10 With the exception of 10 Sussex Street, all the buildings were removed during the 1949-51 remodelling. Ten Sussex Street was converted into a garage and chauffeur's house. Recent additions to the property include an enclosed swimming pool and two guard posts.
- 11 Maureen McTeer, op.cit., p. 25.
- 12 The Canadian Illustrated News, February 1870, cited in Maureen McTeer, op. cit., pp. 13-14.
- 13 Maureen McTeer, op. cit., p. 17.
- 14 Courtney C. J. Bond, Where Rivers Meet: An illustrated History of Ottawa (Canada: Windsor Publications (Canada) Ltd., 1984), p. 57.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Henry James Morgan, editor, The Canadian Men and Women of the Time (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), pp. 366-367.

- 17 "Citizens in all walks of life Honored Late Senator in Death," Daily Citizen (Ottawa), 20 September 1921, p. 5.
- 18 One small photograph of the house appears in Anson Gard, The Hub and the Spokes (New York: The Emerson Press, 1904). It is a partial view showing a steeply pointed gable decorated with Gothic Revival trim and a pair of Italianate windows.
- 19 "The Progress of Ottawa, Part 1," op.cit.
- 20 The house as it appears in photographs taken in the 1940s is generally assumed to be the house as it was built by Joseph Merrill Currier in 1867, but the pictorial evidence, coupled by an explicit reference to the fact that the house was "rebuilt and extended in 1907-09," (The King v. Edwards, op. cit., p. 323.) make it clear that the house looked quite different when first constructed.
- 21 Public Works Canada, Area Screening Paper: National Capital Region (Ottawa: Public Works Canada, 1984), pp. 221-222..
- 22 "The Progress of Ottawa, Part 1," op.cit.
- 23 In conversation with Robert Hill, Biographical Dictionary Project, 1 April 1986; Allward and Gouinlock, 10 April 1986 and 14 April 1986.
- 24 The King v. Edwards, op. cit., p. 334.

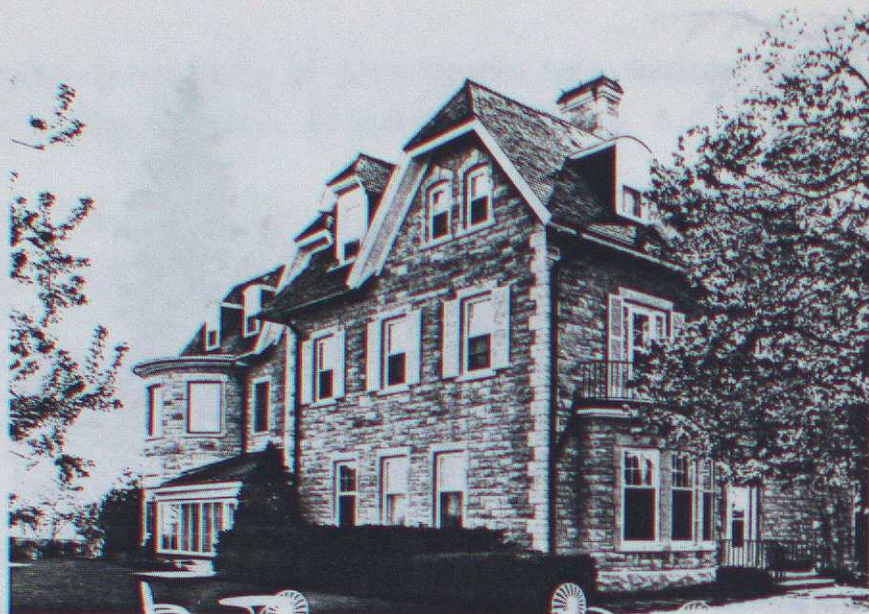


- 1 24 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario; built 1867-68, J. M. Currier, architect; remodelled 1907-09; remodelled 1949-51, Allward & Gouinlock, architects. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)



- 2 24 Sussex Drive, principal facade. (National Capital Commission, 1984.)

24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



3 24 Sussex Drive, north and west facades. (National Capital Commission, 1984.)

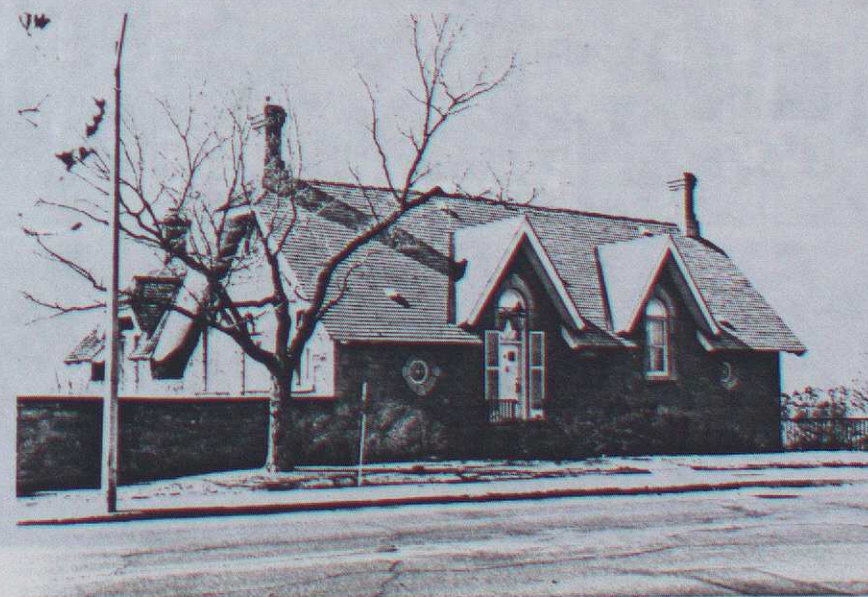


4 24 Sussex Drive, west facade. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)

24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



5 24 Sussex Drive, detail of north facade. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)



6 24 Sussex Drive, chauffeur's house and garage. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)

24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO

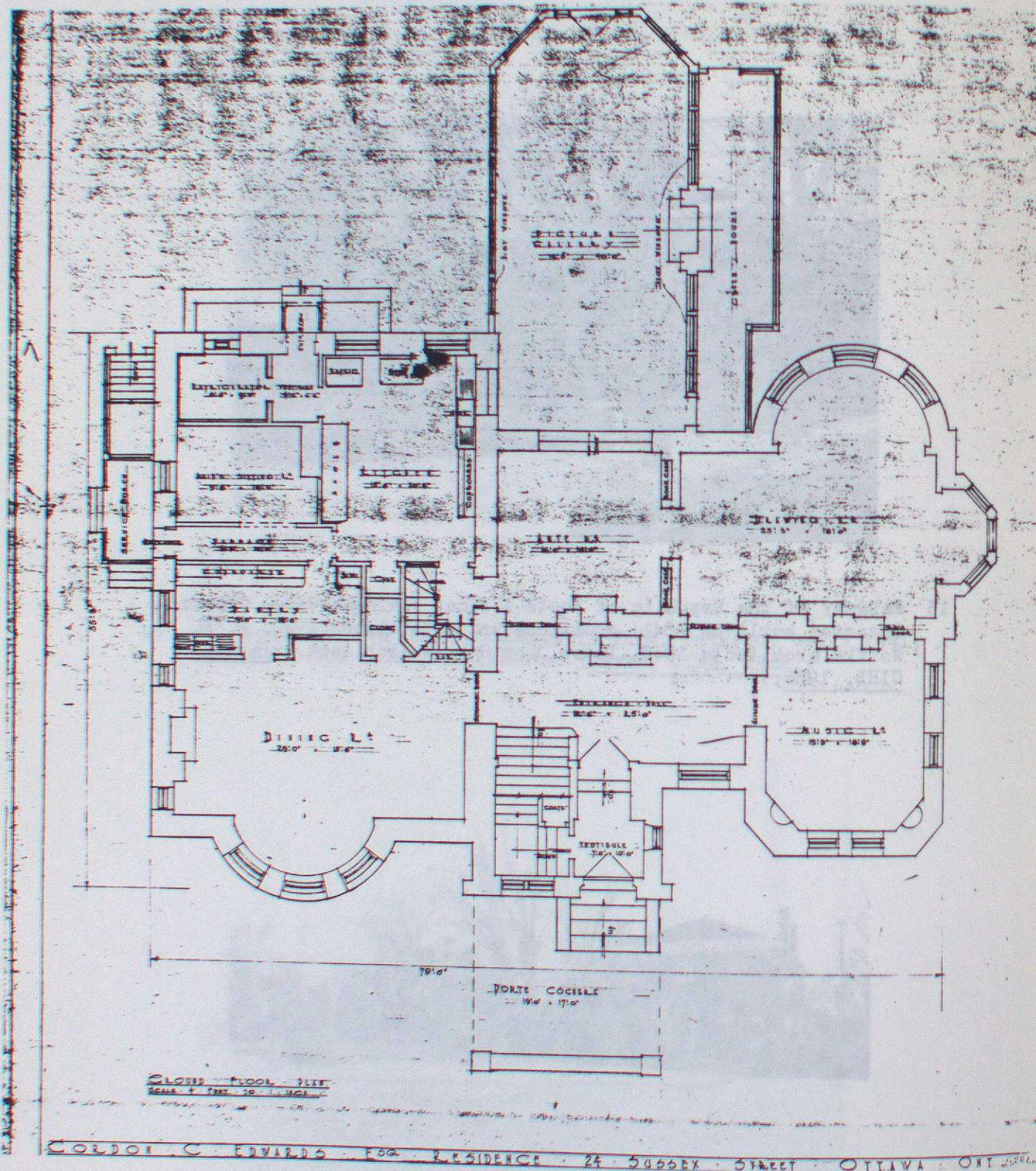


7 24 Sussex Drive, the house in 1949. (Public Archives Canada, PA 123534.)

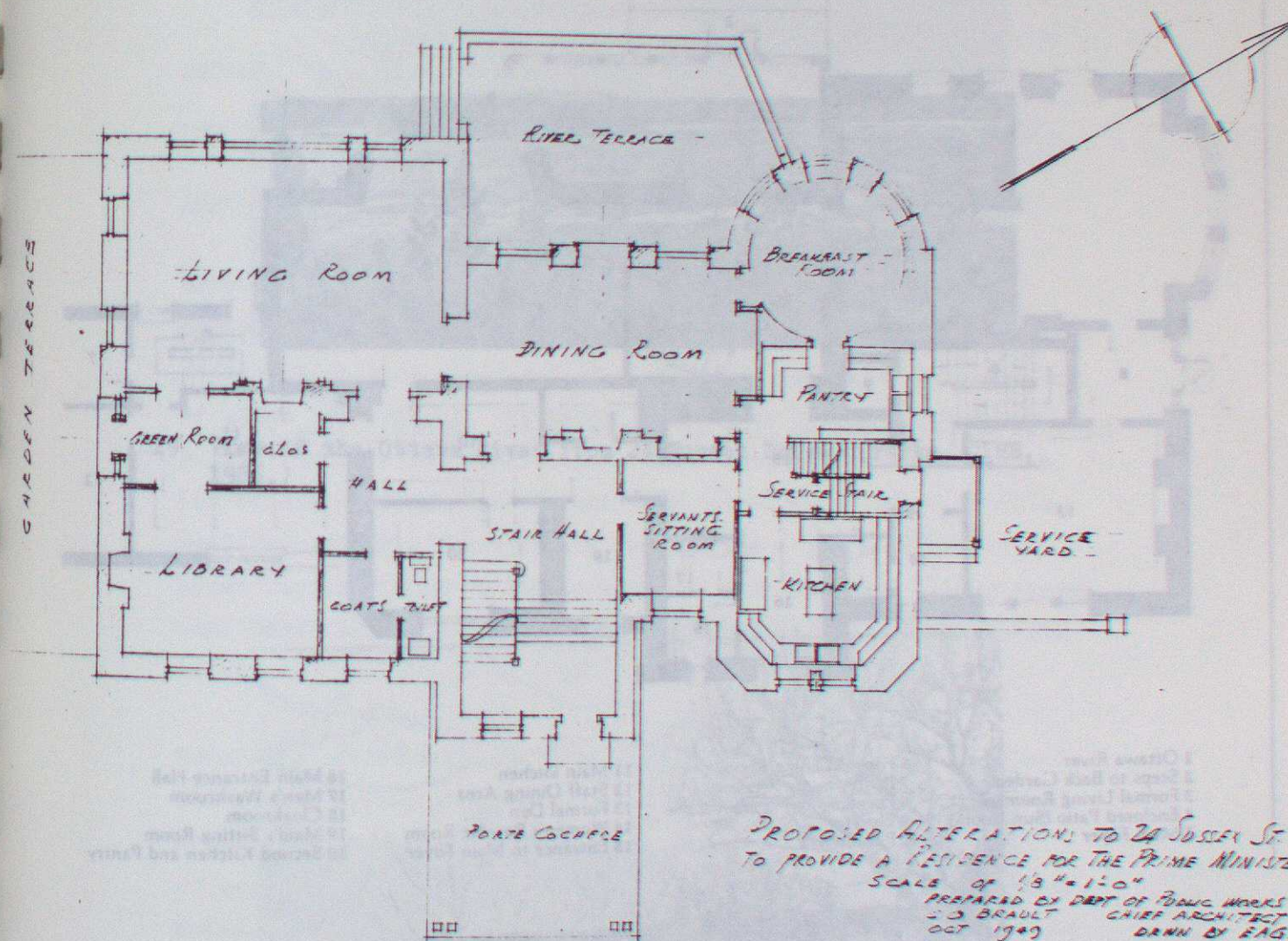
24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



8 24 Sussex Drive, the house in 1951. (Public Archives Canada, PA128116.)



16 Gordon C. Edwards Residence, 24 Sussex Street, Ottawa, Ontario; ground floor plan, 1944. (Public Works, Canada.)

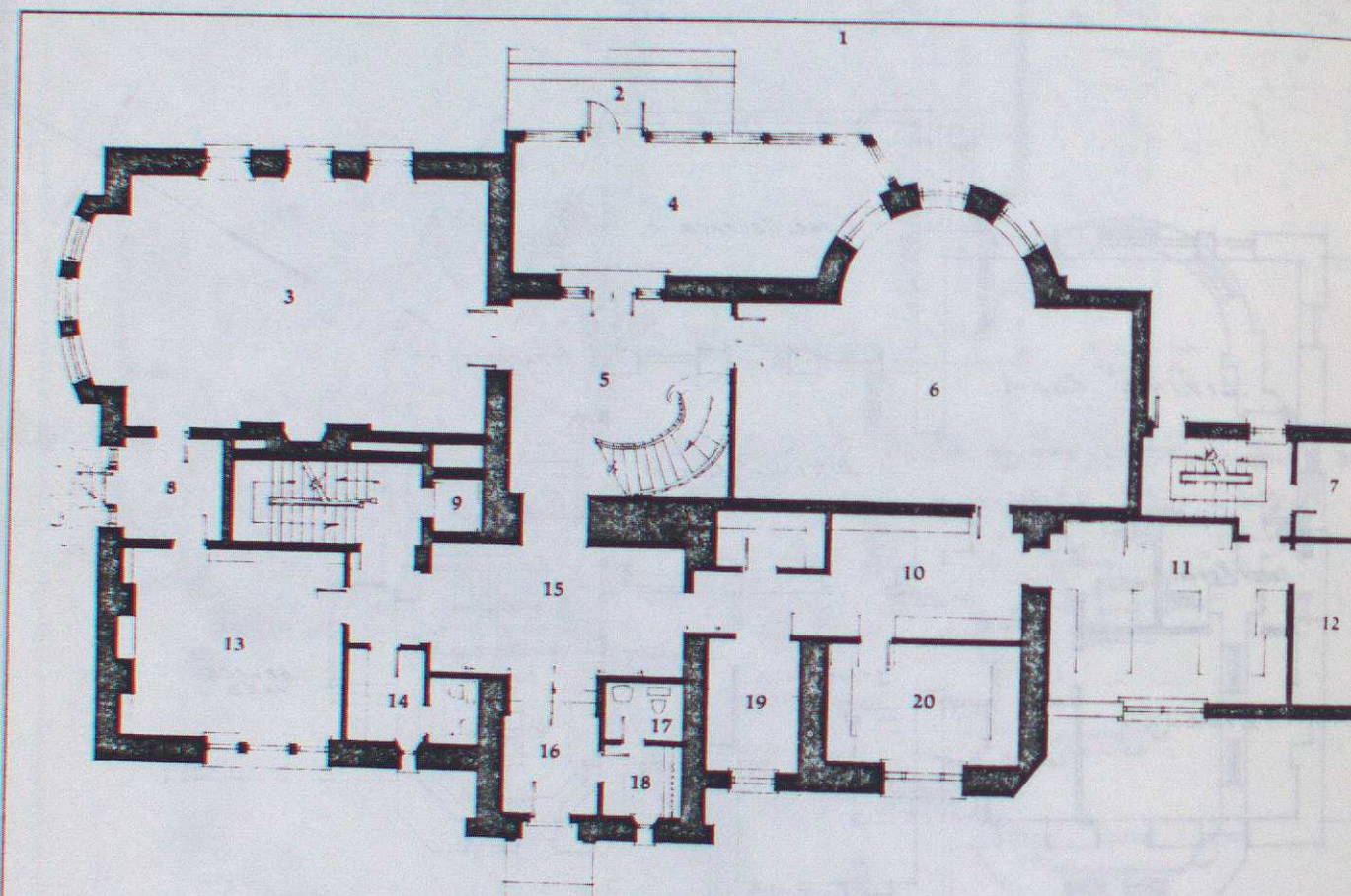


17 Proposed alterations to 24 Sussex Street, ground floor plan, 1949. (Public Works, Canada.)

24 Sussex Dr.
Prime Minister's
Residence

7 Rideau Gate
Guest House

24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Ottawa River | 6 Formal Dining Room | 11 Main kitchen | 16 Main Entrance Hall |
| 2 Steps to Back Garden | 7 Pantry | 12 Staff Dining Area | 17 Men's Washroom |
| 3 Formal Living Room | 8 Passageway | 13 Formal Den | 18 Cloakroom |
| 4 Enclosed Patio (Sun Room) | 9 Elevator | 14 Women's Powder Room | 19 Maid's Sitting Room |
| 5 Main Foyer | 10 Passageway | 15 Entrance to Main Foyer | 20 Second Kitchen and Pantry |

18 24 Sussex Street, ground floor plan, 1949, Allward & Gouinlock architects. (Maureen McTeer, Residences [Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.], p. 40.)

24 SUSSEX DRIVE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



19 View of the Ottawa River from 24 Sussex Drive. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)



20 View of the Ottawa River and Governor's Bay from 24 Sussex Drive. (Parks, CIHB, 1986.)