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Construction of Ottawa's New City Hall Engineering, Architectural Triumph

Perini Limited workmen hoisted into place above the doors of Ottawa's new City Hall a large metal sculpture of the city's coat-of-arms last week. Placing this work by Ottawa artist Art Price was one of the last tasks connected with the construction of the $3,600,000 building and a climax to 36 months of continuous activity on the Green Island site.

Perini Limited, the general contractor, and 23 sub-contracting firms were engaged on the City Hall project. They paid out over $1,300,000 in wages and bought hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of concrete, lumber, brick, paint, tile and other material from local suppliers. At periods of peak activity as many as 300 men were employed on the site. Plasterers, carpenters, ironworkers and others, other than those in the building industry, repaired almost every division of the building industry.

Large Areas of Glass.

In some respects, the new City Hall is basically similar to other modern institutional buildings of multi-storey design. Steel columns and girders support its eight concrete floors. Large areas of glass let light pour into its working areas and lobbies. Unclutered horizontal and vertical lines give it a clean and functional appearance. At the same time the building is distinguished by a number of notable engineering and architectural features. Some of these were necessitated by the island site. Others are designed to give the City Hall the look of elegance and dignity which is appropriate to the administrative headquarters of a capital city.

The new City Hall is the first public building in Ottawa to be fully air-conditioned. Its foundations rest on 80 concrete caissons sunk to rock level 13' to 16 feet below the surface of Green Island. The boilers and heating plant are installed on the eighth floor to provide room for an underground garage with space for 150 cars.

Hundreds of square feet of walnut panelling have been used to decorate the Mayor's office, the Council Chamber and offices of the Board of Control. The outer walls, lobbies and terraces of the building contain over 6,000 pieces of architectural stone, each one cut and finished to exacting specifications. The concrete staircase connecting the ground and first floors is unique in Canada. It climbs 18 feet and spirals through 182 degrees without visible intermediate support. Eight tons of reinforcing steel are buried in its steps.

River 18 Inches Below.

Perini Limited began work on the foundations and sub-structure for the new capital landmark in December 1956 after demolition crews had removed a temporary wartime office building from the site. The Rideau River flowing around the island and a water shed which lies only 18 inches below the depth of the garage floor were factors complicating the caisson work. Another problem was the presence in the sub-soil of large boulders which prevented pile driving. Hundreds of tons of sawdust and logs left over from the workings of an old Green Island saw-mill were also encountered. Hand-digging was used to sink the caissons while special pumps brought in from Sweden kept the holes clear of water.

The substructure for the new City Hall was completed by Perini Limited in April, 1957. It includes the foundations, concrete work for the garage, outer terrace, ground and first floors of the building. A total of 1,000 cubic yards of concrete was used in this phase of the construction.

Steel for the new City Hall was erected by the Dominion Bridge Company Limited. By July, 1957, the framework of columns and girders was towering above Green Island and giving Ottawa its first impression of the size and outline of the building. The boilers were hoisted to the eighth floor level soon after steel was erected and fixed in position. Weeks later after the concrete floor had been poured and cured. Over 7,000 cubic yards of concrete were used in building the City Hall's superstructure.

The 6,000 pieces of architectural stone in the new building vary in thickness from less than an inch to eight inches. The largest blocks are four feet wide and six feet long. Each piece was quarried at Queenston and milled at Philipsburgh, Que. The rigid inspection of this stone and its careful placement in the walls, lobbies and terraces was a time-consuming operation. Hundreds of pieces which did not conform exactly to architectural requirements were rejected.

Stairway Tricky Job.

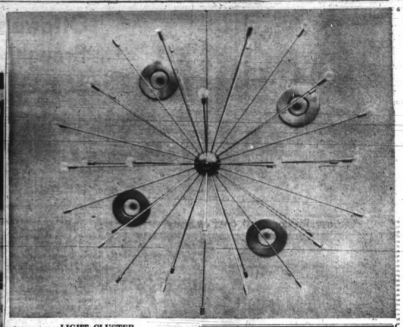
When Princess Margaret opens the City Hall she will almost certainly accord the stairway linking the entrance lobby and first floor. Constructing the form for this elegant structure was one of the trickiest aspects of Perini Limited's work. It was accomplished by plotting the curve of the stairway on the ground floor. Carpenters then built the form upward, plumbing each step to the lines of the drawing as they progressed. To balance the structure concrete was first poured simultaneously into the top and bottom sections, then added to the middle.

Since elected officials and municipal employes took possession of the building on July 2, workmen have been busy putting finishing touches to stone, paint work, lighting fixtures and other details. Tomorrow it will be just a year and a day since His Worship Mayor George H. Nelms and the Board of Control laid the corner stone. The completion of the superstructure in this relatively short time was a noteworthy construction achievement.

MODERN STAIRWAY ARTISTRY:

This spiral, unsupported in its sweep from first to second floor, is the dominating feature of the entrance hallway. Built of white concrete and marble, it is set off with light, strong balustrades of aluminum. The staircase leads to the Council and Board of Control chambers. Its beauty, against a backdrop of glass, is acknowledged by both modernists and traditionalists.

(Journal Photo by Dominion Wide)



LIGHT CLUSTER

This modern candelabra, set in the ceiling above the winding main stairway, sets off the unusual design of the great public halls on the first and second floors. Light treatment varies throughout the building with individual units designed to provide the best possible illumination for the areas they serve.

(Journal Photo by Dominion Wide)

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