

Heritage Citation



Primac House

Key details

Also known as	Canada Cycle and Motor Agency (Queensland) Limited building
Addresses	At 99 Creek Street, Brisbane City, Queensland 4000
Type of place	Showroom/s
Period	Federation 1890-1914
Style	Warehouse
Lot plan	L1_RP857048
Key dates	Local Heritage Place Since — 30 October 2000 Date of Citation — September 2011
Construction	Walls: Face brick

People/associations	Richard Gailey Junr (Dick) (Architect)
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Criterion for listing	(A) Historical; (E) Aesthetic; (H) Historical association
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The building was completed in 1910 for Canada Cycle & Motor Agency (Qld) Ltd. The CCMA sold motor vehicles and bicycles. This was one of Brisbane's first motor showrooms located strategically within the CBD, close to Central Railway Station. The three upper floors were added in 1925. In 1934, it was sold to the Queensland Primary Producers Co-operative and became 'Primac House'. During World War II, as the US Army's main Postal Exchange (PX), the building became the centre point of the 'Battle of Brisbane' riots (26 & 27 November 1942).

History

This building was constructed in 1909/1910 for the Canada Cycle & Motor Agency (Qld.) Ltd. (CCMA) The Company's local history dates from 1898 when the Canada Cycle & Motor Co. bought out the interests of the Massey-Harris Co. The Massey-Harris Co. had established a branch in Brisbane circa 1895 under Mr. A.V. Dodwel. In 1905, Mr. Dodwell purchased the business on his own account with a capital of £12,000. A rapid increase in the motor trade and the need to establish a marine engine branch required more capital. £55,000 was injected into the business and the Canada Cycle & Motor Agency (Qld.) Ltd. formed. A.V. Dodwell became Managing Director. James Johnston and the Honourable T.M. Hall M.L.C. were Directors.

By 1909, CCMA had 8 branches throughout Queensland and employed over 100 staff. The company manufactured bicycles, cars, commercial vehicles, marine engines, motorcycles and sports goods. The company claimed to sell wholesale and retail goods to "every district and centre in Queensland and even branches into the Northern districts of N.S.W." (Barton, 1910, p. 303).

The Company purchased the City site at the corner of Creek and Adelaide Streets on 3 November 1909 and the same day mortgaged it for £3,000. The Jubilee History of Queensland of 1909 described the new building: *...each floor having a frontage of 74 feet to Creek Street and 132 feet to Adelaide Street. This building will be fitted up with everything necessary in connection with the motor and bicycle business, and will be second to none in Australia* (Barton, 1910, p. 303).

Continuing prosperity led the CMMA to extend its premises in 1925. Architect Richard Gailey, junior, designed the addition of the upper stories (*Architecture and Building Journal of Queensland*, 1925, p. 63).

In 1934, the CCMA sold its building to the Queensland Primary Producers Co-Operative Association Ltd. Established in 1923, under a state government Act of Parliament, the association was known locally as 'Primaries'. It operated as a business and conducted cattle and wool sales and sold agricultural products (stockfeed, fertilizers, chemical dips, poison) from its various branches throughout Queensland. It is from these owners that the name 'Primac House' is derived. 'Primaries' leased the building to the National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland in 1935.

The next year, 'Primac House' returned to use as a place associated with the Brisbane automotive community.

Used car dealers Eagers Retail (Pty. Ltd.) leased the building from 1936. In 1937, the Vacuum Oil Company also leased office space in the building. In 1946, the Brisbane Automotive Service Co. Motor Accessories operated from the building (*Queensland Post Office Directories*).

During World War II, 'Primac House' was requisitioned by the Australian Army, the Commonwealth Government and the US Army. 'Primac House' was the Australian Army's Transport Command headquarters and its Manpower and Canteen Services office. The second floor contained the offices of the Brisbane War Road Transport Pool's General Cartage Division, the Women's Land Army, the Women's Auxiliary Central Bureau plus His Majesty's Australian Navy (HMAS) victualling yard administration. The third floor had the offices of the Commonwealth's Deputy Director of Manpower for the Department of Labour and National Service. The fifth floor held offices of the Commonwealth War Damage Commission.

On the fifth (top) floor was the main US Army Postal Exchange (PX) Canteen for Brisbane. Here, US servicemen could obtain liquor, cigarettes, chocolate bars, candy, soda pop and other items supplied direct from the USA. Many of these luxury items were heavily rationed throughout Australia and so were largely unobtainable for both Australian service personnel and civilians in Brisbane. The PX's footpath was often the scene of bartering over US cigarettes between US and Australian troops.

Local resentment grew over perceived favourable treatment meted out to 'the Yanks' by taxis or shops; American brazenness with Australian women; and Americans flaunting their access to luxuries. Anti-American feeling culminated in riots in Brisbane City of 26-27 November 1942. The 26 November was US Thanksgiving Day and celebrations were to be held at the US Army PX in 'Primac House'.

At 6.45 pm, a dispute between two US military policemen (MPs) and two Australian soldiers with their US mate resulted in the MPs being chased back towards the Adelaide Street doorway of 'Primac House' by a group of angry Australian soldiers. The two MPs were rescued by MPs guarding the PX, who beat the Australians with batons. This incited more Australians to besiege the Adelaide and Creek Street doorways of 'Primac House'. By 7.15 pm, about 100 soldiers were yelling abuse at the 814th MP Company personnel. The MPs called their South Brisbane Town Hall headquarters for reinforcements.

The crowd grew to 2,000 troops and civilians (one estimate is 4,000 rioters). Some men collected bricks, rocks and sticks to throw at the MPs. Other rioters tore street signs from the road and began to smash the ground-floor windows of 'Primac House'. The intention was to get upstairs to the PX that represented American privilege and arrogance to many rioters. At 8 pm, two MPs arrived in a Dodge weapons carrier from South Brisbane. As the two MPs pushed through the crowd, an Australian soldier challenged one MP and grabbed his shotgun's barrel. The MP discharged 27 shotgun pellets into the crowd. Private Ed Webster later died while six soldiers and one civilian were wounded. The rioters, some from Webster's veteran 2/9th Infantry Battalion, severely beat 11 MPs. Another eight soldiers were taken to hospital with baton injuries. On 27 November, groups of Australians ranged Brisbane City and assaulted 21 Americans. The PX temporarily closed. The 'Primac House' ground floor windows were boarded-up. More Australian military police and armed troops on picket duty were brought into the City and the assaults stopped the next day. The PX was transferred from 'Primac House' in July 1943.

Statement of significance

Relevant assessment criteria

This is a place of local heritage significance and meets one or more of the local heritage criteria under the Heritage planning scheme policy of the *Brisbane City Plan 2014*. It is significant because:

Historical

CRITERION A

The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history

as it shows the growing importance of motor vehicles by 1909 through its construction for the Canada Cycle & Motor Agency (Qld) Ltd and its interwar and immediate postwar use as a vehicle showroom by other firms.

Aesthetic

CRITERION E

The place is important because of its aesthetic significance

as a finely detailed, early multi-storey, Federation-era landmark commercial building.

Historical association

CRITERION H

The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organization of importance in the city's or local area's history

as the focal point for the infamous 'Battle of Brisbane' that links it to the US Army occupation of Brisbane during World War II.

Supporting images



Unidentified photographer,
'Canada Cycle and Motor Agency Queensland Limited',
1910,
Brisbane City Council Library Services, Brisbane City
Council

References

1. Peter Charlton, "When Brisbane was Base 3" (*The Courier Mail or The Sunday Mail*) J.H. Moore, *Oversexed Overpaid, & Over Here*, (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1981)
2. Peter A. Thompson and Robert Macklin, *The Battle of Brisbane*, (Sydney: ABC Books, 2000)
3. Barton, E.A.T. (1910). *Jubilee History of Queensland: A record of political, industrial and social development*, (Brisbane: H.J. Diddams & Co.)
4. Queensland Post Office Directories, 1908 – 1949 editions
5. Titles Office Records

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Note: This citation has been prepared on the basis of evidence available at the time including an external examination of the building. The statement of significance is a summary of the most culturally important aspects of the property based on the available evidence, and may be re-assessed if further information becomes available. The purpose of this citation is to provide an informed evaluation for heritage registration and information. This does not negate the necessity for a thorough conservation study by a qualified practitioner, before any action is taken which may affect its heritage significance.

Citation prepared by — Brisbane City Council (page revised September 2020)



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