

Province House, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island Heritage Value

Province House is a symbol of confederation for all Canadians. It is one of the places where Canada as a nation first began, and where through the work of a provincial legislature it continues to be shaped. Province House is arguably the most recognized building in Prince Edward Island and since 1966 has been designated a National Historic Site.

The heritage value of Province House, and particularly of its interior elements, is currently being discussed in relation to an upcoming program of major repairs to the building. Those repairs will necessitate the removal and reinstatement of various interior finishes, which are largely period-style reproductions from a restoration program of the 1970s. This has led to questions about the best approach to take to the building interior for the future.

Province House has been designated as having heritage value by the federal, provincial (Prince Edward Island) and municipal (Charlottetown) governments, as outlined below.

Federal:

The building was designated a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1966 as a nationally significant building, and again in 1980 as a court house of national historic and architectural significance representative of the judicial institution in Prince Edward Island. The HSMB minutes highlight the importance of handling the judicial function of Province House in its interpretation.

Province House was also included by the Board within the Great George Street national historic district in 1980.

The 1981 text for the plaque commemorating Province House as a National Historic Site (NHS) was brief, but did refer to the building's neoclassical style, its historic uses (Supreme Court, Legislative Assembly) and its role as the site of the Charlottetown Conference of 1864. It is clear that the building as a whole, on both interior and exterior, constitutes the NHS.

The main detail about the significance of the NHS is contained in Parks Canada's Commemorative Integrity Statement of 2001 and in the federal Statement of Significance included in the Canadian Register of Historic Places, which was last updated in 2012.

The CIS confirms that Province House as a whole is valued, both on the interior and exterior, and that it is valued because:

- it is the site of the Charlottetown Conference of 1864 and contains the Confederation Chamber where those meetings were held;
- it is a fine example of the neoclassical architectural style;
- it housed the supreme court and judicial offices for Prince Edward Island from 1847 to 1972;
- it forms one end of the Great George Street Historic District and remains an important component of Queen Square.

Important elements of the building that are mentioned in the CIS include:

- the characteristics of the neoclassical architectural style, including symmetrical design on both the exterior and interior, balanced exterior elevations with central porticos with pediments, and decorative use of pilasters and columns of the Ionic order;
- the architectural characteristics of the Confederation Chamber;
- the internal configuration of the building, in particular the three main rooms on the second storey;
- the architectural detailing of the interior; and
- the artefact/furnishings collection.

The Statement of Significance (SoS) indicates that the heritage value of this National Historic Site resides in its historical associations with Canadian Confederation and with the judicial system in Prince Edward Island, as well as in its illustration of the neoclassical style of architecture. It mentions the Confederation Chamber, the Legislative Assembly, and the Supreme Court chamber in the statement of heritage value.

As character-defining elements, the SoS lists a number of key elements of the building's exterior, as well as the following interior elements:

- the symmetrical design of the interior with its balanced wings and central staircase;
- the functional sub-division of the interior space (ground floor offices and restored Supreme Court facilities, second floor major public rooms associated with the legislature, upper storey offices);
- the original layout, architectural furnishings and early furniture of the Legislative Council (Confederation Chamber); and
- the materials and excellent early Island craftsmanship of the approximately 50 items of original furnishings of the building.

The SoS does not mention the architectural detailing of the interior, as cited in the CIS. Without further detail, it is unclear what the CIS reference included in that interior architectural detailing.

Provincial:

Province House was identified as a Designated Historic Place by the Province of Prince Edward Island in 2005. The Heritage Places Protection Act of that province does not include provisions that would allow for protection of building

interiors. It does prohibit demolition of a designated building and alteration of a façade or exterior.

Accordingly, while the province's Statement of Significance for Province House includes details of its historic uses and interior rooms, the character-defining elements listed in the Statement of Significance are limited to neoclassical elements on the building's exterior, including its porticos, columns, windows and doorways.

As the owner of the building, however, the province can apply controls to the treatment of its interior. The Statement of Significance does not, unfortunately, assist us in understanding which interior features are considered by the province to have the greatest heritage value.

Municipal:

Province House was recognized as a Heritage Resource by the City of Charlottetown in 1979. The city's authority to designate heritage resources is delegated to it by the Province, under the Heritage Places Protection Act. The city's heritage designation also, therefore, pertains only to the building exterior.

The city's Statement of Significance also lists only character-defining elements of the building's exterior, including:

- the building's overall massing and the symmetry of its facades;
- the Nova Scotia sandstone construction, and the size and shape of its mouldings, pilasters, lintels, sills and beltcourses;
- the style and placement of windows, and the size and placement of the heavy paneled doors;
- the portico and its doorways, columns and pediment;
- the hipped slate and copper roof;
- the size and placement of the chimneys.

Discussion:

Although individual lists and wordings vary, the statements of significance from all three levels of government list the architectural elements of the building's exterior as key character-defining elements.

Only the federal government has the authority to designate the building interior as historically significant, and it has done so. The key interior elements noted in the federal Statement of Significance relate to its general layout and to the Legislative Council/Confederation Chamber.

Neither the Historic Sites and Monuments Board minutes nor subsequent documents ascribe heritage value to the restoration of the interior that was carried out between 1974 and 1983, or to its materials such as the new lath and plaster and other period-style finishes. The heritage value of the overall interior remains very significant, however.

Since Province House is a National Historic Site of Canada, and has been designated as having historic significance by all three levels of government, it is important that the impact of any proposed project on the heritage character of the building be evaluated based on the Commemorative Integrity Statement for the building, on the various statements of significance that exist, and on the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.

As stated in the *Standards and Guidelines*, the goal of all conservation work on an historic place is to safeguard its character-defining elements so as to retain its heritage value and extend its physical life. The evaluation of various conservation options for Province House is hampered, however, by the lack of identification of character-defining elements on its interior. The legislative framework that is in place has prevented a clear statement of significance regarding interior elements of the building from being included in the province's statement of significance. The province should therefore be consulted about the heritage value and character-defining elements of the building's interior.

Also, those interior finishes and features that are authentic historic material, rather than period-style reproductions, should be identified. The flagstone flooring in the ground floor entrance area, for instance, appears to be original and is highly evocative of the building's long history, but has not been mentioned in any statement of significance.

The *Standards and Guidelines* define three types of primary conservation treatments: Preservation, Rehabilitation and Restoration. Using the definitions in the *Standards and Guidelines*, the short-term maintenance and stabilization work that was carried out in 2012-13 would be considered a Preservation treatment. The upcoming major repair project could be defined as primarily a Rehabilitation treatment, since substantial repair and replacement of deteriorated features is necessary.

The replacement materials of the 1974-83 restoration project, such as new lath and plaster, are not part of the building's historic fabric and are not noted as character-defining elements in any of the statements of significance that have been developed for the building. Depiction of at least parts of the interior at a particular period in the building's history will likely remain important, however, so replacement of visible elements in those areas (e.g. major public rooms) would need to be carefully considered. It may be important to reinstate the restoration materials in the Confederation Chamber, Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court, to protect their heritage character, even though those restoration materials are not listed as character-defining elements.

In non-public support spaces (e.g. offices), replacement of non-original restoration finishes like lath and plaster with contemporary finishes such as gypsum board could be considered, without reducing the heritage value of the

building. Finishes in some limited areas have already been replaced with gypsum board, during emergency stabilization work of 2013.

Consideration could also be given to replacing concealed elements such as back-up masonry with compatible contemporary materials, as long as those contemporary materials did not introduce technical problems that would adversely affect the masonry assembly. Repair techniques for historic masonry must be carefully assessed to ensure that they do no harm, for instance by introducing contaminants, interfering with moisture movement, or changing the way in which a masonry assembly behaves structurally.

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