

Gravenhurst, Ontario
Bethune House
235 John Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Norman Bethune Memorial House in Gravenhurst was constructed in 1879-80. It was occupied by the Bethune family from 1890-93, and is the birthplace of Dr. Norman Bethune. Maintained as an interpretive memorial, it is the property of the Canadian Parks Service. See FHBRO Report 90-210.

Reasons for Designation

The Bethune House was designated Recognized for its historical significance as the residence in Canada which can best be associated with the life of Dr. Norman Bethune, and also for its architectural significance and landmark value.

The choice of Norman Bethune's birthplace as a memorial to his career is a function of the mobility of the family and of Doctor Bethune himself. Thematically, the memorial is a monument to social justice and human welfare, convictions held by Dr. Bethune.

The Bethune House is a very good example of a typical middle-class residence found throughout Canada in the late nineteenth century. The design of the house reflects the Picturesque manner in massing and detail. It has been restored to the period 1890-93, when it was occupied by the Bethune family.

The building's relationship to the grounds remains largely intact, and reinforces the historic residential character of the neighbourhood. The house is a landmark in the community, and has particular symbolic significance for visitors from China.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the Bethune House resides in its overall design, massing, fenestration and exterior and interior details, and in its residential setting. The clapboard, asymmetrical L-shaped house is a good example of a basic form popular during the mid-nineteenth century. The steeply pitched roof, vertical emphasis, ornamental verge-boards, bay windows and verandah are all typical elements which are important to the character of the house and should be respected, as should the detailing and symmetrical arrangement of the windows.

The asymmetrical plan reflects the first serious alternative to the more conventional centre hall plan. The rooms are informally disposed around the entrance hall and stairs. Some earlier changes -- the addition of a fireplace, partitions between

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Bethune House (Continued)

bedrooms on the second floor have been reversed, and an original window has been

covered but is still in place. Generally the layout of the house remains basically unaltered, and should be preserved.

Most of the interior detail and finish is intact and in good repair, and should be maintained.

In future, efforts should be taken to accommodate the interpretive program without unduly altering the original floor plan. The juxtaposing of period restoration with modern museum displays should also be avoided if possible.

The grounds of the house are largely intact. Considerable care has been taken in researching and reconstructing the landscape associated with the house during its use by the Bethune family. This is an important feature of the memorial and should be maintained.

The Bethune house and site reflect the present character of the street, which has remained primarily residential on the edge of the downtown core. This quality should be maintained.

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