

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Visitor Orientation Centre

Amherstburg, Ontario
Fort Malden NHS

The Visitor Orientation Centre at Fort Malden was constructed as a museum in 1939. It was designed by James Carlyle Pennington, architect. Since construction, interior alterations to meet functional changes have occurred. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 91-181.

Reasons for Designation

The Visitor Orientation Centre was designated Classified for its architectural importance, its environmental significance, and its historical associations.

The Visitor Orientation Centre was built as a museum to house historical exhibits related to Fort Malden. The historicized exterior of the building reflected the romantic approach to the presentation of Canadian history popular at its construction. The Visitor Orientation Centre is a very good example of a Colonial Revival style which was evocative of Québec colonial architecture. The well proportioned, symmetrical building with characteristic steep roof is domestic in scale.

The original informal site has evolved into a formal landscape which continues to evoke the historical associations intended by the building design.

The Visitor Orientation Centre is associated with the presentation and interpretation of history as practiced in Canada during the 1930s, illustrating local enthusiasm and interest in cultural resource conservation and historical interpretation.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Visitor Orientation Centre resides in its form, overall proportions, details of its Colonial Revival style design, materials, surviving interior layout, and relationship to the site and setting.

The building is a single storey, rectangular structure with a steep roof. Typical of French Colonial Revival style, details include simple massing distinguished by a prominent dormered roofline and projecting stone gable ends with chimneys. The symmetry, good proportions and balanced arrangement of dormers and windows contribute to the formality of the design. The footprint, massing, and the simple roofline should be maintained.

Textures and materials are integral to the heritage character of the building. The slate

roofing and rough limestone walls with dressed stone window surrounds are typical materials of the style. Unique elements include the stone corbelling and decorative "S" bearing plates on the gable ends, the recessed panels below the windows front and rear, and the projecting entranceway. The materials merit conservation expertise and regular maintenance. The stonework should be monitored for damage by the ivy on the walls.

The existing multi-paned wood windows are in keeping with the Colonial Revival character, adding scale and detail. They should be retained. The modern entrance door and sidelight uses inappropriate materials and is overscaled. The door should be replaced at the end of its service life with a door compatible with the original design. The blocked dormer windows and ground floor side windows should be reinstated.

The original single interior volume has been divided, such that half now serves as an auditorium, and modern ceilings have been installed. The original fireplaces are concealed and dormers and windows blocked. Reinstatement of the single volume and the dormers and windows would be encouraged. The extant features and trim should be preserved and incorporated into any rehabilitation project.

The formal landscape around the building appropriately reinforces the image of the museum building as a manor house on an estate.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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