

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The museum and caretaker's house were built in 1935-36, and are thought to have been designed by W.D. Cromarty, Chief Architect for the Parks Branch Architectural Division. The museum continues to house exhibits illustrating the history of Louisbourg, and the former caretaker's house is now used as staff offices. The custodial department is Environment Canada. See FHBRO Building Report 90-304.

Reasons for Designation

The museum and caretaker's house were designated Classified for their historical associations, their architectural design, and their environmental significance.

The erection of these buildings signaled the beginning of the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park, and are generally illustrative of the presentation and interpretation of history as practiced in Canada in the early 20th century, and especially during the 1930s, which was a significant period in the development of Canada's historic sites. The Louisbourg museum is closely associated with John Stewart McLennan, an early proponent of the reconstruction of the Fortress who was instrumental in the eventual commitment of federal government funds for its development. His daughter Katherine McLennan was also devoted to Louisbourg, serving as honorary curator of the museum from its inception until 1961. This close association of committed individuals with an historic site is typical of the early development of Canada's national historic parks.

The museum and caretaker's house illustrate the architect's picturesque attitude to the design of buildings in park settings. The historicized exteriors are evocative of French colonial architecture of the Baroque era, and reflect the popularity of colonial revival styles in the 1920s and 1930s.

The buildings have environmental significance as a symbol of the park's beginnings, and as structures that reinforce the historical nature of the site without attempting to replicate original buildings.

Character Defining Elements

The museum and caretaker's house appear as two separate buildings, but were designed and built as one project, with common foundations and shared services. The principal facade of the house faces the north end of the museum across a square walled courtyard.

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Fortress of Louisbourg National Park
Museum and Caretaker's House

The heritage character of the ensemble resides in the buildings' massing, fenestration and materials, as well as in their interior layouts and features, and their relationship to the historic setting.

Both buildings have steel structures, with rock-faced Wallace sandstone walls and dressed stone window and door surrounds. They are low storey-and-a-half forms with simple rectangular footprints and slightly bell-cast hipped roofs pierced with hipped dormers. A formal symmetry is evident in the placement of dormers and multi-paned segmentally-arched windows. The museum's stone door surround is surmounted by a dormer with elaborate Baroque detailing. The museum's rear elevation is pierced with loophole windows.

Materials and detailing of high quality distinguish the ensemble. Copper roofing, fine masonry work, wood doors, sash windows and original storm windows are all features that merit a program of careful maintenance.

Interior layouts are relatively unchanged, although washrooms have been added to the basement of both buildings. The museum's interior volume is the full storey-and-a-half, and is distinguished by geometric cornice mouldings and ornamental beams springing from decorative plaster shields. The volume and the decorative features are intact and merit preservation. The original museographic display is extant and contributes to the historical value of the ensemble.

The caretaker's house has been modified with the addition of fluorescent lighting and baseboard heaters. Any future alterations should be preceded by an identification of original features and finishes.

The site's austerity is appropriate, reflecting the harsh local climate as well as the minimal ornamentation characteristic of the Louisbourg settlement. This restrained approach to site development should be continued so that the museum and caretaker's house continue to fit comfortably within the historic site.

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