

Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan
Assembly Hall (Building #20)
Lot 7, Block 1, Lakeview Drive
Waskesiu Townsite

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Assembly Hall was constructed in 1931 within the Waskesiu townsite. It was built as a privately-owned dance hall by William Schon, a merchant from Prince Albert, who owned and operated it until the late 1940s. The Architectural Division of the National Parks Branch, in exercising its responsibility for the townsite, significantly modified or completely redesigned the preliminary plans submitted by the owner. The building was acquired and renovated by the National Parks Branch in 1970, and converted to serve as a public assembly hall. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 85-63.

Reasons for Designation

The Assembly Hall was designated Recognized because of its status as a local landmark, largely due to its former use as a dance hall, and because of its thematic associations with park recreational activities during the 1930s. Its site within the Waskesiu townsite remains essentially intact.

This is the second oldest remaining example of a dance hall in the National Parks system, and the only one owned by the federal government. It is a typical but not exceptional example of the numerous dance halls built and operated in summer resorts across the country during the "dance craze" years of the 1920s, '30s and '40s. It also represents a period of National Parks policy which encouraged various commercial and recreational activities within the parks and townsites. Additionally, it is one of the oldest commercial buildings remaining in the Waskesiu townsite.

The design of the building is consistent with the design guidelines introduced by the Architectural Division of the Parks Branch in 1929-30. These guidelines promoted the combination of native materials and certain architectural motifs borrowed from the Picturesque cottage tradition to establish a distinctive rustic image. Although not in itself an outstanding example, the Assembly Hall forms part of the group of townsite buildings representing the application of these guidelines to both privately-owned and public buildings.

The exterior massing and elevations have survived virtually untouched since construction. The interior, which was more utilitarian in nature, has undergone various modifications, however the large assembly space and flanking side-aisles or "promenades" remain largely intact.

.../2

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Assembly Hall resides primarily in its exterior massing and elevations, its symbolic prominence as a landmark, and its surviving contextual relationship with the original business section of the townsite. The massing and elevations are the most significant heritage features of the Assembly Hall. The simple rectangular gabled-roof mass is articulated on all four sides by the fully enclosed promenade/verandah structure, which in essence is a porch extending out from the main gabled roof structure and supported on separate perimeter posts and beams. A rooftop ventilating lantern and small gabled roof over the main entrance doors are other important massing elements. The simple yet distinctive massing of the building should be respected in any future development.

The elevations are characterized by symmetry, and by the use of wood finish materials. Horizontal drop siding is colour-contrasted with corner boards, skirting boards, casings and window units. The projecting roof purlins and rafter ends, as well as the gable finial above the front doors, are reminiscent of the Picturesque cottage aesthetic. These features should be retained.

Consideration may be given to reinstating the original front stair configuration, which has been altered. Any additional exits should be designed to respect the building's established architectural vocabulary in terms of detailing and materials.

The building's fenestration is of interest. Horizontally-oriented window units are located under the eaves, with screened sash units expressed as strip windows at the side elevations. It is possible that strip windows formerly existed at the back elevation. The windows of the front elevation are symmetrical, horizontally-oriented and mullioned. The strip window vocabulary of the side elevations is an important design feature to be maintained. The symmetry and mullioned construction of the windows at the front elevation should also be respected during any future window upgrading project.

The original design called for asphalt shingle roofing, which continues to be an appropriate finish material for this building. The configuration of the roof, with exposed rafter tails visible at the eaves and purlins visible at the verges, as well as wood sheathing, should be retained and repaired in kind as required.

The interior has undergone minor modification. The back promenade has been filled-in with a stage flanked by washrooms, while the front verandah's rooms flanking

.../3

the entrance have been enlarged. Side exit doors have been added toward the back of the building. Future renovations should respect the building's intended strong longitudinal axis, incorporating a large high open space reminiscent of the dance hall volume, and integrating the repetitive column bays of the promenade side aisles as design features. Investigation should be undertaken to confirm the existence of the dance floor's original hardwood strip flooring; a return to this floor material would enhance the building's heritage character.

The building's site and its relationship to the original business section remain intact. Among the oldest group of buildings of the Waskesiu townsite, the Assembly Hall is an integral component of the historic urban fabric and every effort to ensure its continued use is encouraged.

93.12.10

93.11.29