

FHBRO Number 96-114

Fort Langley, British Columbia

### **Big House**

Fort Langley NHS

The Big House was constructed in 1958-59 to the design of architect J. Calder Peeps as part of the partial reconstruction of Fort Langley by Parks Canada. The building is part of the Fort Langley National Historic Site. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 96-114.

### **Reasons for Designation**

The Big House has been designated Recognized for its contribution to the character of the reconstructed Fort Langley site, for its architectural interpretation of the original building on this site, and for its historical associations with the efforts of Parks Canada to interpret Canadian history through the reconstruction of historical sites.

As the largest structure within the reconstructed Fort's palisade, the Big House is the most prominent building of the site, and in its design, materials and construction techniques complement the sole original structure of the Fort (the Storehouse) and the other reconstructed structures on the site. The character of the site reflects the 1950s interpretation of the original Fort's utilitarian arrangement of structures and landscape.

The building is a good example of a period reconstruction in its exterior representation of the simple and utilitarian form and design of the Fort's typical early buildings. While based on historical documentation, the reconstruction of the Big House was not intended as an accurate replica of the original building on the site. The existing structure displays some evidence of its modern construction, particularly in the interior of the building which serves as a "stage" for interpretation.

The conservation approach taken at Fort Langley typifies Parks Canada's approach to reconstruction in the late 1950s, which emphasized the educational role of historic sites. The Fort Langley site was acquired by the federal government and designated a National Historic Site in 1923, but it was not until the late 1950s that the reconstruction work took place. The Big House was reconstructed in 1958-59 to coincide with the centenary celebrations of the proclamation of the colony of British Columbia, which had taken place in the original building in 1858. The building continues as the venue for the annual re-enactment of this event.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Big House resides in the features which contribute, by means of sympathetic form, volume and detailing, to recalling the original character of Fort Langley as interpreted by Parks Canada during the 1950s.

The two-storey Big House is a rectangular structure that is five bays in length and three bays in width, with formally arranged windows and elevated entry doors. The building's

FHBRO Number 96-114

Fort Langley, British Columbia

**Big House**

Fort Langley NHS

log-hewn structure, Red River framing, whitewashed exterior and hipped roof were designed to recall the appearance of the original structure, as were the building's architectural details, including the front verandah (added at a later date), window sash design and operation, and panelled door design. The building is located (more or less) on the site of the original Big House, and is slightly narrower than the original.

The simple form and volume of the structure and the functional design of its detailing illustrate the utilitarian nature of the original building. The building's interior presents an interpretation of the probable appearance and arrangement of the original building. Any alteration to the form, volume or detailing of the building should be based on a sound understanding of the basis for the existing design, and on the potential impact of the intervention on the exterior appearance of the building or its relationship with other buildings in the Fort. Modifications which would alter evidence of the building's provenance as a 1950s reconstruction should be avoided. The design of the new accessible ramp added at the rear of the building displays an appropriate form and use of materials and colours.

The on-going management of the building and maintenance of the structure's materials and finishes should be designed to support the commemorative intent of the site and respect Cultural Resource Management principles.

The Big House has a high visual profile within the Fort's palisade, as the largest structure and one of only two white-washed buildings. Any alteration to the landscape surrounding the Big House should be based on sound historical documentation, and should respect the intended presentation of the reconstructed structure.

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

1999.08.10