

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Willson House Complex

Meech Lake, Gatineau Park
Hull, Quebec

The Willson House Complex consists of five buildings situated on approximately 30 acres. The estate includes a house and four surviving ancillary buildings: a chapel, a garage and caretakers' house, a stable and carriage house, and a woodshed. These structures were built in 1907 to the designs of an Ottawa architect, possibly Edgar L. Horwood. It is now the property of the National Capital Commission. See FHBRO Building Report 84-08.

Reason for Designation

On January 8, 1985, the Willson House Complex was designated Classified because of its architectural significance, its influence on the historical development of the area, its association with a prominent Canadian figure, and the quality of its environmental setting.

The careful massing, materials and detailing of the buildings suggest a restrained and relatively symmetrical version of the Queen Anne Revival style, in harmony with the rustic setting. The construction of the Estate marked an early stage in the development of the Gatineau Hills for recreational purposes. Thomas Leopold Willson's prominent role in scientific research and development has been recognized by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, and at his summer house he entertained the famous and the influential. The estate continues to reinforce the dominant character of the area.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the property is defined by the rustic but carefully designed setting and by the architectural treatment of the buildings.

The landscape is the result of extensive site planning, extending from the granite and wrought iron gates, along the winding private road with low granite walls and light standards, past the various outbuildings, to the highest point of land, where a sweeping drive leads down to the main house. In front of the house is a grassed area bordered by a simple wrought iron and granite wall, below which is a grassed terrace commanding a spectacular view of Meech Lake. The house itself is set into a cut into the rock shelf behind it. The design and detailing of the landscape are essential to the unity and character of the property and must be protected.

The main house displays rough stone, wood shingles, half-timbering, deep bracketed and flared eaves, and a variety of oriel windows and verandahs which together give a rustic appearance to an essentially symmetrical and rather formal plan. The

outbuildings, which with the house create an integrated country estate, complement the design of the main structure, with their bracketed and flared eaves, bargeboards, and stone or imitation stone walls. The level of detailing and craftsmanship is high, and all exteriors should be meticulously protected and conserved. The continuity provided by the simple but substantial interiors should also be respected.

The significance of the complex as a whole is due, to a great extent, to the consistency with which the concept of a summer residence, still relatively new in the Canadian context at the time, was carried through. With relatively few changes other than the loss of the imposing boathouse in 1980, the integrity of the site remains high. Any changes, whether to the architecture or the landscape, should be kept to a minimum and must not interfere with harmony that has been created.

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

1987.02.04