

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island
Ravenwood House (Building #5)
Experimental Farm

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Ravenwood House was built between 1820 and 1828 as the home of the Hon. William Johnston, Attorney General of Prince Edward Island. The land was leased by the federal government in 1909 for use as an experimental farm, and the house was renovated to serve as the farm superintendent's residence. The house ceased to be used as a residence in 1990. Agriculture Canada is the custodian department. See FHBRO Building Report 91-71.

Reasons For Designation

Ravenwood House was designated Recognized for its association with several important government figures and with the development of experimental farms in Canada; for its integration of Georgian and Classical Revival architectural styles; and for the integrity of its site and setting.

Ravenwood was built as a country estate by William Johnston, who served as Attorney General of Prince Edward Island from 1813 to his death in 1828. At the time of Confederation, the house was occupied by J. C. Pope, who variously served as Premier of the province, one of the first Members of Parliament from the Island, and federal fisheries minister from 1878 to 1882.

The experimental farm is one of a number developed by the federal government at the turn of the century to improve Canadian agriculture through research. Ravenwood House, the only surviving 19th century building on this farm, and indeed the central building around which the farm was planned, has been home to a succession of superintendents, the first being Dr. J. A. Clark, a well-known and respected PEI agriculturalist.

A classically inspired structure originally built with a five bay facade, steep hipped roof and verandah wrapping around three sides, Ravenwood House was renovated in 1909 to create a classical revival composition with symmetrical double-storey bay windows and a classical portico. The result is a very good example of both early 19th and early 20th century classical designs.

Ravenwood House stands on its original site, and is the last of the big Royalty of Charlottetown estates to maintain a connection with its substantial grounds. Located near the entrance to the frequently visited farm, it is a regional landmark.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of Ravenwood House resides in the successful elaboration of the original Georgian era building with elements of the Classical Revival; in the quality of its workmanship and materials; and in its park-like surroundings within the experimental farm.

Ravenwood House is a striking two-storey, hip-roofed wood frame structure clad in clapboard. In 1909, the original wrap-around verandah was removed, and wide bay windows, a portico and roof lantern were added. The symmetry of the original front facade was preserved, but the original five bays were reduced to three. A strong vertical emphasis is created by the bay windows, the full-height pilasters at the corners, and the centrally-placed roof lantern. This is balanced by the one-storey entrance portico and the overall relationship of height to width. The resulting composition exhibits a strong sense of solidity, enlivened by classical detailing in the pilasters and in the portico with its columns and porch balustrade. These qualities must be preserved.

The interior retains its 1909 layout of front parlours, rear kitchen wing, and Superintendent's office on the main floor, with four bedrooms above. The arrangement of rooms reflects the exterior symmetry and should be retained. The integrity of the interior is reflected in its 19th-century detailing, including marble mantelpieces, plaster ceiling rosette, echinus mouldings, and main staircase. These should be carefully preserved.

The major renovations of 1909 were done with care, preserving some of the earlier building fabric. The sandstone foundation and hewn and pit-sawn timbers survive from the 1820s house. The exterior clapboard appears to date from 1909, while some of the wood trim may be earlier. Windows may have been replaced in the 1947 modifications; wooden multi-paned sash windows are visible in the 1914 photo, and would provide a model for replacement units when required.

Ravenwood House is the last of the 19th century country estates in its environs to retain substantial grounds. The house is approached via a sweeping circular drive. The extensive front lawn has been embellished during this century with trees planted by various governors-general of Canada and by members of the British Royal family. This historic setting enhances the character of the house and should be preserved.

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