

Ottawa, Ontario  
**Observatory House (Building #2)**  
Central Experimental Farm

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

Observatory House was built in 1909 to a design by the Chief Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works. Erected as a residence for the Dominion Chief Astronomer, it continued to be used for that purpose by a succession of Chief Astronomers until 1963, when it was converted to laboratory and office space. The building is currently occupied by the Geological Survey of Canada. Energy Mines and Resources Canada is custodian of the building. See FHBRO Building Report 92-36.

### **Reasons for Designation**

Observatory House was designated Recognized because of its historical associations, the quality of its architectural design and its importance within its setting.

Observatory House is associated with the theme of Canadian research in astronomy and geophysics. Built in 1909 shortly after the construction of the Dominion Observatory, the building served as the official residence of the Dominion Chief Astronomer for many years, including William King, R.M. Stewart, and C.S. Beale, each of whom made significant contributions to the field. In addition to its residential function, magnetic survey work and other research were carried out in the building's basement laboratories.

In its design, Observatory House includes elements of the Queen Anne Revival and Classical Revival styles, resulting in a somewhat formal, but picturesque, overall appearance. The standard of craftsmanship and materials is high, particularly for the interior finishes and trim.

The site retains much of its early Edwardian landscape features and character, and the house is a distinctive feature in that area of the farm.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage value of Observatory House resides in its overall design, and in those aspects of its design and fabric which relate to its function as the residence of the Dominion Chief Astronomer. The quality of its extant interior historic finishes, and the character of its site plan and features, are also important heritage elements.

The building is a large and dignified two-and-one-half-storey structure, constructed in brick, with a stone foundation and wood shingle roof. The Queen Anne Revival style of

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the late 19th century is evident in the picturesque aspects of its design, including its irregular eave lines, generous verandah around two elevations, slightly projecting entrance and the shingle finish in the gables.

Classical Revival style is also evident, largely in the general restraint of the design, the balanced arrangement of dormers, the classical columns, uniform windows, and centrally located ground floor entrance and hall. Despite minor alterations to the chimney, the porch, and the interior, the historic integrity of the building is high. Maintenance work should be carried out with matching materials in all cases to preserve the character of the building.

In the interior much historic detail and finish may be intact, but has been obscured by recent finishes such as floor tile and dropped ceilings. Significant interior finishes and features include the main and rear stairs, wood-and-leded-glass windows, intact interior millwork and fireplaces. Early finishes and features should be identified and recovered as part of any future renovation.

Despite the construction of an out-of-scale parking lot at the front of the house, much of the character of the building's context survives. Much of the early landscaping scheme and detail elements survive, including garden paths, portions of the northwest fence, lawn, border plants and the willow tree. The present laboratory and office use makes heavy demands on the building. A less demanding use would permit a more appropriate development and appreciation of the building and site.

1994.01.13