

FHBRO Number 97-095

Baddeck, Nova Scotia

Alexander Graham Bell Museum

FINAL

Chebucto Street

The Alexander Graham Bell Museum at the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site was built in 1954-56. It was designed by Osborne Howard Leicester, chief architect with the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, in association with the Montreal firm of Campbell, Wood and Associates. A large addition in 1975-77 tripled the size of the museum. The addition was designed by J.W. Francis of Parks Canada. Accessibility modifications were carried out in 1996. The original museum structure is currently used for visitor orientation and reception, while the addition contains the museum's collection. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 97-95.

Reasons For Designation

The Alexander Graham Bell Museum was designated "Recognized" because of its architectural values, its environmental significance and its historical associations.

An important work of Osborne Howard Leicester, the attractive A-frame structure features a large column-free interior space that has successfully accommodated changes in function. The large 1977 addition enhanced the functionality of the building by addressing curatorial concerns through the provision of an environmentally controlled environment for artifacts. The modern design has a rustic character created by the uncoursed, rock-faced sandstone exterior walls, the patterned, coloured slate flooring, the laminated wood beams at the roof and the redwood fittings and furnishings.

The museum building is prominently located on the edge of a hillside overlooking Baddeck Bay and is well integrated into the gently rolling topography leading to the waterfront. The building complements its park-like setting and respects the scale of its residential neighbours. The site serves as a gateway to the community of Baddeck from the north, and is familiar within the community of Baddeck.

Built specifically to hold Alexander Graham Bell artifacts, the museum building is associated with the commemoration of a nationally significant aspect of Canadian history. It has contributed to the growth of a seasonal tourist industry in the area.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Alexander Graham Bell Museum resides in the building's form, proportions, modern design and architectural details, construction materials, interior planning and site relationships.

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The museum building has a high A-frame form with a two-storey gabled roof, and a prominent triangular entrance vestibule with a tipped-up canopy roof located asymmetrically at the principal elevation. The overall structure has strong asymmetrical massing, including roof profiles, entrance vestibule, secondary gabled roofs, flat-roofed areas and a prominent chimney. The low-scale and horizontal expression of the addition, which was built into the hillside, is subordinate to the dramatic expression of the original museum's roof profile. The complex footprint reflects the tetrahedral geometric grid underlying the plan, as well as the relationship of the original building to a sizeable later addition. The complex massing, footprint and profile are characteristic of mid-1950s Modernism and should be maintained.

The facades are executed in random-coursed, rock-faced local sandstone, complemented by exposed redwood used for the window and door framing, fascias, soffits and roof sheathing. The A-frame roof structure of the museum building is clad in a uniformly textured and subtly coloured slate, which contributes to the rustic aesthetic of the building, and should be maintained. Characteristic of modern design, all materials used on the building are simply detailed. At the entrance, a modernist spatial approach is reflected in the use of multi-coloured slate flooring which continues from the interior to the exterior and which mirrors, in plan, the overhanging triangular roof above. The masonry and redwood merit an ongoing maintenance program grounded in conservation expertise to assist in the choice of materials and techniques for repairs and replacement.

The gable ends of the A-frame structure are glazed with triangular multi-pane sash windows which appear consistent with original designs. The fine scale of the mullions were intended to evoke the lightweight space frame structure of Bell's kite designs and should be maintained. The exhibit areas running parallel to the lake have maintained the original large glazed wood sash windows which contribute to the light, spacious quality of the interiors and are characteristic of the original design.

The large, open volume of space and multi-level floor area under the A-frame structure was a characteristic feature of the original design and has been maintained. The functional planning of the museum has been enhanced by the planning of the 1977 addition. Original interior finishes (geometric-patterned wood and metal guardrails; redwood doors, millwork, ceiling sheathing and furniture; slate and terrazzo floors; and exposed wood laminate trusses) reflect the interest in integrating different materials and textures that was characteristic of 1950s Modernism.

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modernist landscape design approach and should be maintained. The simple, functional planning of the site reflects the design of the structure; any changes or additions to the site should reflect this precedent.

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

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