

## Character Defining Elements of Province House National Historic Site

Though its surroundings have been transformed over the last 150 years, Province House National Historic Site has endured largely unchanged.



1846?



1899



1860



1907



1866



2013

Source: PEI Public Archives and Records Office



**Question: Why is Parks Canada conserving Province House NHS through this project?**

**Answer:** Parks Canada is committed to the preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of our national historic sites, including Province House. The conservation work carried out now will stabilize the existing character defining elements of Province House National Historic Site and protect its heritage value.

In 2001, a Commemorative Integrity Statement was developed for Province House NHS which highlighted the physical elements of the building that were to be protected. This document helped to inform architectural reports, which outline the options for the building's conservation. Conserving the character-defining elements of Province House is paramount in this entire endeavour.

**Question: What exactly is the conservation approach being used?**

**Answer:** The conservation approach being used for Province House NHS is one of rehabilitation. The goal is to protect the character defining elements of the building related to the reasons for its national historic significance and its importance to Islanders while ensuring long-term structural sustainability. The rehabilitation work seeks to enable the current use of the building to continue by repairing deteriorated building elements, including in-kind replacements and the use of modern engineering techniques and materials where necessary.

The work being carried out will respect the importance of fiscal sustainability and also ensure the site is conserved for many years to come.

**Question: What are some of the character-defining elements found on the exterior of Province House?**

**Answer:** Province House is a National Historic Site of Canada and has national, provincial and municipal heritage designations. Built between 1842 and 1847, the building is a fine example of the Classic Revival architectural style that was popular in British colonies at that time. There are a number of characteristic features to the building from a heritage conservation point of view. These include:



### The building's symmetrical design



View of south side of Province House National Historic Site

If you look at the overall shape of the building, you will notice that it is well-proportioned and **symmetrical**, and that both sides of the structure match each other. This pattern is also continued in the interior of the building. The Confederation Chamber on the west end of the building is a mirror image of the room that housed the Provincial Legislature in the east end.

### The balanced exterior elevations with central porticos with pediments

Both the north and south façades of Province House feature temple-like **porticos** that shelter central entrances on both sides of the building. The **pediments** are the triangular upper part of the portico. These finely-detailed porticos feature Ionic columns (see below), masonry arches, stone cornices and pediments, as well as the regularly-spaced windows across the façades, further accentuating the symmetry of the building.



View of portico, pediments, piers and pilaster, Province House NHS

### Decorative use of columns and pilasters of the Ionic order

Ionic columns and pilasters can also be found on the second story portico area.

“Ionic is one of three column styles builders used in ancient Greece. More slender and more ornate than the earlier Doric style, an Ionic column has scroll-shaped ornaments on the capital, at the top of the column shaft” (<http://architecture.about.com>).



View of an Ionic column capital, Province House NHS

On the exterior at the ground floor level, we see both **piers of the Doric order** (another style from Ancient Greece) and decorative **pilasters**. These are both rectangular in shape, but the piers do the heavy lifting, with the pilasters added on as decorative features.



Angled view showing Ionic columns, above and Doric piers with decorative pilasters, below.

### Exterior masonry walls

In addition to these decorative elements, the exterior walls themselves are a character-defining element of this building, featuring grey Nova Scotia freestone (sandstone) with fine craftsmanship.

The sandstone used for the exterior wall was sourced from quarries in Pictou, Nova Scotia and chosen at the time for its durability. As you can see from this photo, the stones are not brick-sized, but large blocks of hand-tooled stone. Because each stone is individual in its size and shape, care needs to be taken into account in any conservation work.



View of work on sandstone blocks,  
Province House NHS



View of sandstone fine jointing work and repairs,  
Province House NHS

Now notice the repair (rectangular patch) and fine space between the stones in the photo above. It is a challenge to patch into this heritage stone and so great care must be taken in the approach and execution. The image shows how very small and fine the jointing work is with a finished face on the outside. On the inside of the stone there are larger gaps that allow for a bed of mortar. This precision in craftsmanship requires that repairs made to the mortar be made from the interior, rather than the exterior of the walls. This approach will help to protect the “fabric” (stone finish) and decorative elements of the stones themselves.

**Question: What are some of the character-defining heritage elements found on the interior of Province House?**

**Answer:** The character-defining elements of Province House are not limited to the exterior of the building. There are many fine heritage features found in the interior of the Province House as well. These include the central staircase off the main corridor with large rooms distributed on each side and the double-height of the Legislative Chamber and Confederation Chamber located at the opposite ends (east and west) of the building.



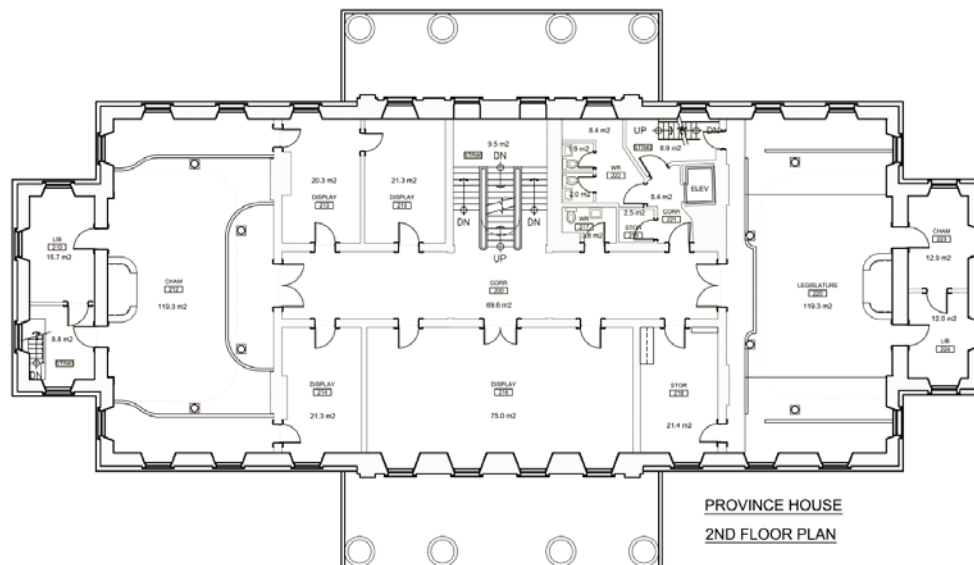
### Architectural characteristics of the Confederation Chamber



View of the Confederation Chamber, Province House NHS

Some of the characteristics of the Confederation Chamber itself include the double-height, high-vaulted ceilings, the upper balcony, the cornice moulding and the rails that feature bird's eye maple graining. The canopy over the dais is also an important feature.

### Internal configuration of the building, especially the second floor



Floor plan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Province House NHS

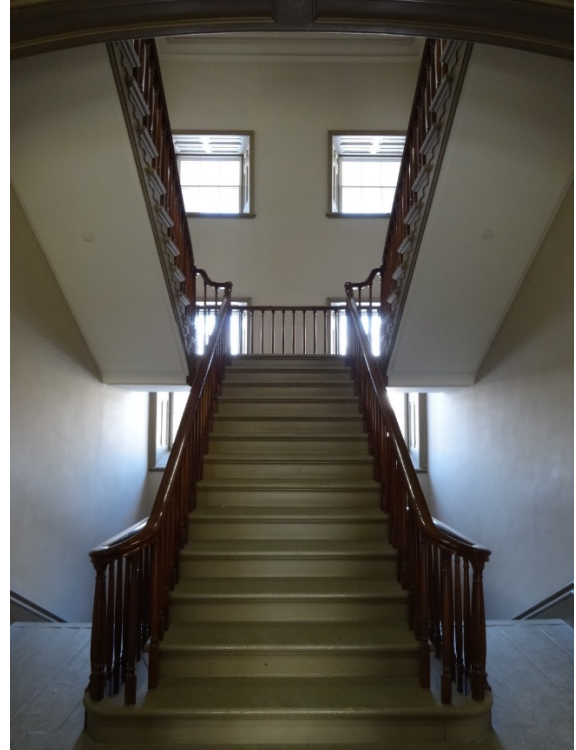
As mentioned above, symmetry is a key component of this building. Here, you can see how the dimensions and lay-out of the Confederation Chamber (left, above) is echoed at the other end of the building in the room that housed the Provincial Legislature (right, above). In addition, the main room in the north centre of the floor (bottom, above) once served as the legislative library and has also maintained its historic features.

### Architectural detailing of the interior

There are unique architectural details that illustrate the “neo-classical” language through the building as a whole, including the central staircase, corridor arches, ceiling medallions, mouldings and wood sashed windows. Once again, symmetry is a primary component of the design.



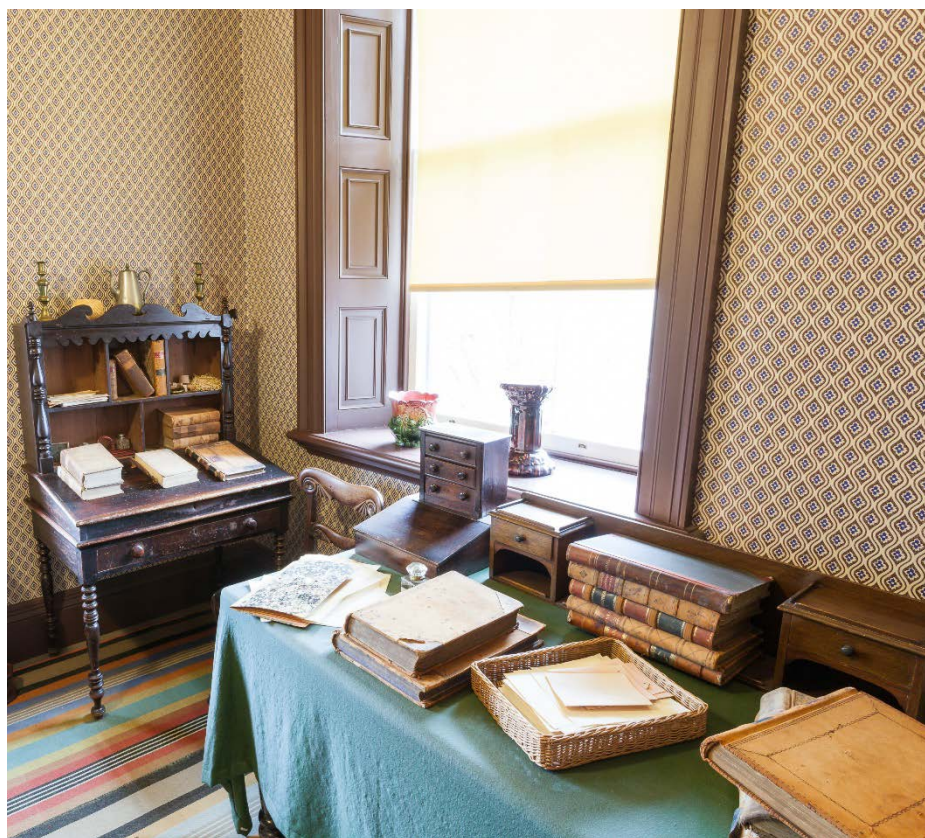
View of an arched corridor and ceiling medallions on the first floor during rehabilitation work, Province House NHS



View of the central staircase on the second floor, Province House NHS



View of wooden moulding, Province House NHS



View of a wood sashed window from the second floor, Province House NHS

### **Artefacts and furnishings**

As you can see from the photo above, Province House also is the home of many fine artifacts and furnishings from the Confederation period. When Province House first closed in 2015 in preparation for this conservation work, approximately 500 artifacts were removed. These artifacts, many of which are original to the building, ranged in size from a small pen to the large table that the Fathers of Confederation sat around during the Charlottetown Conference of 1864.

These pieces were carefully transported to Parks Canada's Conservation and Collections facility in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia to safeguard them during the conservation project. The artifacts are sensitive to humidity and temperature and this facility was built specifically for artifacts.

Parks Canada is committed to the long-term conservation of Province House National Historic Site. We are working closely with experts from various fields to protect and preserve this treasured place for future generations. In short, we are giving our past a future.