



Stone by Stone

Province House Conservation Project

Province House National Historic Site is currently undergoing the most significant conservation project in its more than 170-year history. Province House is a historic and complex building and its conservation presents the unique challenge of rehabilitating the structure while respecting its heritage and character-defining elements.

The Government of Canada is investing in Province House to conserve this structure, which is both the historic birthplace of Canada and the seat of Prince Edward Island's Provincial Legislature. This project began in 2015 and is slated to be completed in 2021. Full details of the project can be found on our website:

www.parkscanada.gc.ca/provincehouse.

This periodic newsletter will delve deeper into the story of Province House and the efforts to save this iconic piece of our cultural heritage.

Heritage Character-Defining Elements of Province House

- Symmetrical design
- Balanced exterior elevations with porticos and pediments
- Decorative use of columns and pilasters
- Exterior masonry walls
- Architectural characteristics of the Confederation Chamber
- Interior details like the central staircase, corridor arches, ceiling medallions, mouldings and wood sashed windows

You can learn more about these elements on our website:

www.parkscanada.gc.ca/provincehouse

Photo courtesy of the Government of PEI, 2014



Phase One is Complete

Since May 2017, extensive work has been ongoing at Province House to protect and stabilize the building. Phase one, which was led by Quinan Construction Ltd. of Orillia, Ontario, involved the protection and, in some cases, the removal of the historic features found inside Province House. Some of the features include columns, pilasters, ceiling medallions, arches, windows and the central staircase. Each of these elements has been diligently wrapped and tagged for protection and will be put back in its original place during a later phase of the project. Outside the building, work has been completed on the first phase of a steel exoskeleton to help stabilize the building and to provide a safe and efficient work platform, a perimeter fence has been constructed, and the foundation of the building has been excavated.

Quinan Construction brought in key people from Ontario and supplemented staff with local labour, with the majority of the subcontractors being from the Island. In addition, the contractor collaborated with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island to engage an Indigenous employee, and graduates from the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program at Holland College were also hired to work on the project.

What's Next?

Phase two is now underway. This portion of the conservation work will focus on the building structure, including the conservation of the exterior walls, and work related to the foundation, structural interior walls, floors and roof, as well as making the exterior of the building universally accessible. The contract for construction management services for the next phases of the project was awarded on behalf of Parks Canada by Public Services and Procurement Canada, Canada's centre of expertise for conserving public built heritage, to PCL Constructors Ltd.

The interior work done during phase one provided key information about the masonry wall construction, which has better defined the conservation approach for phase two. While still in need of significant work, the walls are in better condition than expected. The original approach called for a complete dismantling and reconstruction of the exterior walls; however, a combination of *in situ* repairs and dismantle/reassemble can now be accomplished, which is less invasive and will preserve more of the building's heritage character.

A Revised Conservation Approach

Readers of previous editions of this newsletter will recall that one of the major goals of the project is to repair the exterior stone walls. When Province House was constructed in the 1840s, the builders used a technique common for the era: two courses of stone with a rubble infill between them. Over the past 170 years, water has penetrated the exterior walls of Province House in many ways - from the roof, between stones, and even up from the ground through the stone foundation. Rainwater and a weak mortar mix have contributed to the deterioration of the bond between the stones in the wall.

The original proposal to fix this issue was the dismantle/reassemble approach: to remove stones from the structure one at a time and then repair them and reassemble the

wall. However, further investigation has shown that an *in situ* approach could work in many places.

What does *in situ* mean? It indicates an approach where the damaged walls are repaired in place, rather than being completely removed and reassembled. This approach is less invasive, protects more of the heritage fabric of the building, and is more cost-effective. In some cases, where the stone is noted to be in particularly poor condition, the dismantle/reassemble approach will still be used. The project team is confident that this combined approach will work best for Province House's conservation needs, and is in line with best practices in the conservation of heritage buildings.



Foundation Island stone after deep raking (left) out and deep joint and void filling in progress (right). Photos courtesy of HCS, 2017

Completed *in situ* repair test.

A Work in Progress

The interior of Province House has changed greatly since the beginning of the conservation project in 2015. Here are some photos to give you an idea of the extent of the work underway.

Confederation Chamber



Legislative Assembly



Legislative Library



The Story of Thomas and Frances Preedy

Province House National Historic Site is celebrated for many reasons – it has been the seat of the Prince Edward Island Legislature since 1847, and was the setting for the Charlottetown Conference of 1864, where the Fathers of Confederation first met to discuss the union of British North American colonies. However, did you know that a family once lived in the basement of the building? Thomas and Frances Preedy were keepers of the Province House (then known as the Colonial Building) in the mid-1800s.

Thomas Preedy was born in Oxfordshire, England in 1803. He met Frances Moore, who hailed from Maidstone, Kent and they were married there on October 20, 1831. The first of their six children was born one year later in St Martin's, Oxford County, England. Thomas worked as a grocer in the area. Census records indicate that they were still living in Great Milton, Oxfordshire, England as late as 1841.

Information is scarce about the young family's move to the new world, but they eventually settled in Charlottetown sometime in the mid-1840s. Thomas was appointed keeper of the Colonial Building in 1847, the year the building opened. He later moved

on to become a clerk at a firm on Queen Street, but Frances stayed on as housekeeper for the building.

Thomas, Frances and their six children lived in a small apartment in the basement of the building. They were in cramped quarters to be sure, but the Thomas family received a salary of 50£ annually, which was as much money as some members of the Legislative Assembly earned at the time!



"Colonial Building from Hughes Corner," 1850-1860, lantern slide, Public Archives and Records Office of Prince Edward Island, Acc2702/s23/6



Quick Tips for Visitors

Even though Province House is closed for conservation, Parks Canada is telling the story of the building and Confederation itself:

Explore **"The Story of Confederation"** exhibit at the Confederation Centre of the Arts (upper foyer), which includes an impressive replica of the Confederation Chamber. Free admission.

June: Monday - Saturday 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

July and August: Monday - Saturday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Sunday 12:00 pm - 5:00 pm

- While visiting "The Story of Confederation," be sure to watch Parks Canada's award-winning film, **"A Building of Destiny,"** about the 1864 Charlottetown Conference.
- Coming this summer, don't miss **Province House: Virtual Reality!** This interactive and fully immersive VR experience promises to be a fun and engaging way to experience Province House like never before. Keep an eye open for it on the Upper Plaza of the Confederation Centre of the Arts, near the Box Office entrance.

Contact Us

Parks Canada is committed to sharing the story of this important conservation project at Province House National Historic Site.

Email: pnipe.peinp@pc.gc.ca

Phone: 902-566-7050

Mailing Address:

2 Palmer Lane
Charlottetown, PE C1A 5V8