

A new experience

by Malve Petersmann, Parks Canada



While construction and interior finishing continues at Province House, a small team of project managers is setting their sights on the final phase of the national historic site’s renovation: what visitors will experience when the doors re-open to the public.

Working closely with partners from the Legislature and the Mi’kmaq community, Parks Canada has kick-started the development of an interpretive plan. In October 2019, a stakeholder engagement session focussed on identifying target markets and opportunities was held in Charlottetown. This was followed in February by an interpretive planning workshop attended by over 30 local stakeholders and partners. The information gathered during these two events, coupled with additional engagement sessions held with representatives of Indigenous, newcomer, and special interest communities, will form the basis of the interpretive plan, which will help guide the future development of interpretation, exhibits, and programming at Province House.

Parks Canada has contracted local cultural and heritage professional Dr. Kathleen Wiens to develop the plan. With over a decade of experience, Wiens has supported projects on a variety of topics - from music to military to natural resources and beyond. Wiens most recently worked at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, and moved to the Island in 2019 for love (she married an Islander). She has been delighted (but not surprised) to discover how much she loves life on PEI, and is thrilled to be part of the Province House team.

To ensure that the interpretive plan appropriately addresses all of the key themes and stories identified during the planning sessions, the team responsible for the plan’s review includes a variety of historians – both local and national – as well as conservation experts, representatives from the provincial legislature, and Indigenous consultants. Work on the plan is well underway, and once it has been finalised and approved, it will become the foundation for the development of the visitor experience at Province House.

If you would like more information about the interpretive planning process, or have ideas and contributions to share with the project team, please contact Chantelle MacDonald. chantelle.macdonald@canada.ca



“The Story of Confederation” in the upper foyer, Confederation Centre of the Arts, ©Parks Canada

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.

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. Free admission.

Hours of operation:
July and August - 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.
September and October - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday to Saturday, closed Sunday

Contact Us

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

To learn more, visit our website: www.parkscanada.ca/provincehouse or contact us:

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Province House
National Historic Site

Stone by Stone Province House Conservation Project

Province House National Historic Site is currently undergoing an extensive conservation project. Built more than 170 years ago, Province House is a complex building and presents the unique challenge of rehabilitating the structure, while respecting its heritage character-defining elements.

The Government of Canada is investing in Province House NHS to conserve this historic structure, which is both the birthplace of Canada and the seat of Prince Edward Island’s Provincial Legislature. This project began in 2015 and is slated to be open to the public again in 2022. Full details of the project can be found on our website: www.parkscanada.ca/provincehouse

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

Issue 6 – Summer 2020

Fast Facts

- Province House National Historic Site was built between 1843 and 1847. It is both the historic birthplace of Confederation and the seat of Prince Edward Island’s Provincial Legislature.
- The first session of the Prince Edward Island Legislature was held in the building in January 1847. It is Canada’s second oldest active legislative building, after Nova Scotia’s “Province House,” which opened in 1819.
- Province House is owned by the Province of Prince Edward Island and is operated as a national historic site by Parks Canada, thanks to an agreement signed with the Province in 1974.
- A major restoration project was undertaken by Parks Canada between 1979 and 1983 to restore a portion of the building to the 1864 period.
- Between 2011 and 2013, additional renovations were done in advance of celebrations in 2014 to mark the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference.



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Conservation work during COVID-19

By Jon Stone. Public Services and Procurement Canada

Measures put in place to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19 created a range of challenges for continuing the conservation of Province House National Historic Site. Work on the iconic heritage building kept going but with a few changes in how things were being done. When the restrictions brought on by the pandemic began, initially there was a reduction in the number of people working on site. Many of the skilled tradespeople who were from other provinces returned home. In consultation with authorities, new enhanced procedures for working on site were implemented.

“The bus slowed down for a bit but didn’t come to a stop,” said project site representative Brian Willis.

“Everything has changed in some way,” said Brian. “The biggest change was the expanded use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves, respirators and face shields. Given the nature of the masonry work, PPE was already a requirement and everyone wore half mask respirators. Now, masons have to wear full face shields along with respirators and gloves in order for them to work within 2m distances of each other, which is sometimes necessary given the weight of the stones and the difficulty lifting them in place.”

For some trades, such as the stone conservators, the working routine didn’t change very much. They are normally in full PPE anyway, and usually work alone for the jobs they tackle such as in situ stone repair.



Two masons wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) along with face shields as they install a stone.

There have been other changes on site including additional hand washing stations and portable toilets; staggered lunch breaks to keep the workers physically distanced; and deep cleaning of washrooms and common areas every evening. Even security procedures have been modified so workers can avoid making close contact as they enter the site.



Contractors on break standing 2 metres apart while wearing respirators.

Tim Chandler, Project Manager for Public Services and Procurement Canada which manages the project on behalf of Parks Canada says, “We have been extremely fortunate that the Province of PEI has managed to keep solid controls in place to reduce the spread of the virus. This has meant that we have been able to keep some level of work continuing at Province House”.

Tim says that work is slowly ramping up again as more workers are able to return to the site. “We continue to work very closely with our construction manager and in consultation Provincial public health officials to ensure we are meeting or exceeding all the requirements to keep everyone safe and healthy.”



New enhanced procedures, including additional hand washing stations, have been implemented on site.



Two masons working within tight quarters as they install an exterior stone.

Next Chapter

By Maureen Coulter, Parks Canada

Parks Canada bids farewell to longtime employee Greg Shaw

It was the summer of 1979.

Eighteen year old Greg Shaw of Charlottetown had just graduated from Charlottetown Rural High School and was on the hunt for a summer job. He applied to Parks Canada and received a summer student position cutting grass on the labour crew. That fall, he went on to pursue his studies in engineering at the University of Prince Edward Island.

In 1983, he started working on the labour crew again and went on to apply and receive the Technical Officer position in 1986. This new position entailed looking after the entire P.E.I. Field Unit, from roads and campsites to beaches and historic sites, including Province House National Historic Site. Shaw has been working solely on Province House since 2018 and has held the title of Project Manager for the P.E.I. Field Unit since 2009. Fast forward to 2020 and Shaw is bidding farewell to Parks Canada after 41 years with the Agency.

“What started as a summer job turned into a lifetime career for Greg Shaw,” said Karen Jans, Field Unit Superintendent, PEI.

“Shaw has been a valuable employee to Parks Canada. We will miss his wealth of knowledge and expertise in the P.E.I. Field Unit.”

Shaw has enjoyed various projects over the years, but the one nearest and dearest to his heart has been Province House National Historic Site.

The 173 year old historic building, where the Charlottetown Conference was held in 1864, has unveiled many fascinating artifacts and interesting stories over the years. This includes finding coins from the mid 1800s, sherry bottles and a floral cross of unknown date and origin as well as observing the interior sandstone work (the stone get smaller from the first floor to the third floor because the stone pile got smaller during construction).

“You never really know what you are going to find,” said Shaw. While some artifacts have been unveiled, others remain a mystery. Shaw said that historical documentation indicates that a time capsule was installed in a cornerstone of the building when construction began in 1843 containing “the history of the day”, but the time capsule has yet to be discovered.

“It’s a mystery,” said Shaw. “We have an idea where it may be, but we are not 100 per cent sure.”

A memory that stands out above all the rest is when Shaw received the phone call that Province House was bombed on April 20, 1995. As unfortunate and disheartening as this event was, it was also the same moment where he saw the kindhearted and spirited nature of Islanders come out in full force. A large number of windows exploded as a result of the blast and a note was put out through the media looking for cylinder blown sheet glass. The response from Islanders was overwhelming.

“I spent about two weeks going all over the Island, looking at glass and picking up glass and talking to people throughout the Island,” said Shaw. “People really wanted to help.”

As he reflects his years with Parks Canada, and more specifically Province House, he says it has been an honour to work on a building with such historical significance.

“We are working on the building where Canada was founded,” said Shaw. “It is the only place left that is still standing where the Father’s of Confederation met. What happened here is the basis for the country we are living in.”

Even after all these years, he still can’t keep the awe out of his voice when describing Province House.

“It’s that quiet echo that you get, even when people are in there,” said Shaw. “It’s the echo through the building that you can tell that it’s a place of significance.”

Shaw said he plans to walk through these historic halls once again when the building reopens to the public in 2022.

In the meantime, Shaw plans to enjoy retirement.

“I’m going to putter and do little jobs around the house, like putting a garden in and relax a little bit,” said Shaw.

He also plans to continue volunteering as District Chief with the District 2 Charlottetown Fire Department and one day embark on a cross country trip with a trailer and nothing but open roads.

The thing he says he will miss the most about his job is his colleagues. “The people that work at Parks Canada are very passionate about what they do, and they want to see things done right,” said Shaw. “They are dedicated employees.”

From all of us at the Parks Canada P.E.I. Field Unit, we wish you all the best in your well-deserved retirement. Thank you for all of your hard work and we hope you will come visit us again soon!



Nicolle Gallant is replacing Greg Shaw as the Project Manager for the P.E.I. Field Unit. Gallant has been with Parks Canada for 10 years, working mostly as a Finance Manager and most recently as the Project manager for Federal Infrastructure Projects.

Ongoing Conservation Work During Summer Months

Phase two of the conservation project continues at Province House National Historic Site.

Public Service and Procurement Canada (PSPC) is managing this important project on behalf of Parks Canada and in October 2017, they awarded the contract for construction management services for phases two and three to PCL Constructors Ltd.

RJW Stonemasons arrived on site in January 2019 to begin preparations for masonry work. They completed assessments of the interior and exterior walls and are now carrying out the required masonry repairs. You may have noticed that parts of the building have been sheltered by white sailcloth. This was done to create favourable conditions for the masonry work. Masons have completed the west pavilion and will continue their work in the east pavilion, beside the Coles Building. Staging enclosures at the north and south porticos will be fitted for the masonry work, set to begin later this summer.

Portico work

by Lydia Miller, Parks Canada

A portico is a porch of sorts, often located at the entrance of symmetrical classical and beaux-arts buildings. It lends a certain stateliness to a building and protects those entering the building from the elements. They often have stone arches, cornices and columns that support a triangular element called a pediment and its roof.



The temple-like porticos at Province House divide the north and south facades into three equal parts each. They are inspired by classical architecture and employ pilasters on the ground level and columns that span the second and third floors above. Interestingly enough, the porticos you see today were a debated feature during the design and construction of what was then called the Colonial Building. The structure's design took several forms due to political and economic pressures throughout the building process; forces that are still alive and well in large government building projects today.

The design of the porticos was happening while construction of the exterior walls was already underway. As such, the porticos and wings had to be structurally tied into the existing exterior walls, and were therefore the last features completed, in 1847. As a result of the ad hoc construction phasing, the original foundations for the porticos were not as deep as the rest of the building's and they began to shift over time. In the 1856 the Superintendent of Public Works, Silas Bernard reported that the lack of proper foundations at these areas had led to uneven settlement and were unsightly. Tenders were called and new foundations and steps were built at the porticos, constructed of a combination of stone from the Pictou

As mentioned in previous issues of this newsletter, disassembled windows from Province House have been sent to Ultimate Construction's workshop in Barrie, Ontario. Two windows have remained on Prince Edward Island and are in the process of being conserved by students from the Holland College Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program. An expert conservator is working with students in this exceptional training experience. This summer, some of the windows will be returning to the site to be reinstalled in the west pavilion.

In the basement, work will begin to repair and replace interior/ exterior stones. The cellar floor will be lowered by approximately one meter to create more headroom so that the basement becomes a usable space for mechanical and other required services. Some selected demolition, including the electrical, sprinkler and HVAC systems, will be removed in preparation for phase three of the conservation project. Floor joists and beams will be replaced and the attic truss will be reinforced.

quarries (Nova Scotia) and local PEI sandstone.

Fast forward 164 years and we again need to install new foundations under the porticos of Province House. Over time the stability of the foundations had become compromised. The combination of de-icing salts being used on the steps above and saturated soils from ground water below, led to the washing out of mortar in the foundation walls. Furthermore, freeze-thaw cycles and ice-lensing had eroded de-stabilized the inner-most layer of the masonry wall (referred to as the inner wythe) of the below ground masonry.

Because the porticos were physically tied into the main exterior masonry walls when they were built, it was critical that the portico structure not move relative to the rest of the building. To ensure this, some significant structural ingenuity was required to support the porticos while the ground below them was completely excavated and new foundations installed.

Project engineers were tasked to design a steel structure and a work sequence for the foundation replacement of the portico columns. This procedure permitted the temporary bracing of the portico columns (one at a time) during the removal of the existing stone foundations and the pouring of new concrete foundations beneath each of the eight columns. A series of sensors were installed and carefully calibrated to monitor both the porticos and the main facades to ensure that vibrations and movement remained within a 1mm tolerance during this construction process. The systems were monitored electronically; weekly reports were issued and any significant movement would be immediately communicated to the engineers and contractors. This highly specialized work was successfully completed in the winter of 2019 and will ensure that the porticos remain stable for at least another 160 years.

Possible architect's rendering of the Colonial Building as finished. The divided spelling of "Charlotte Town" was used by the architect. (Public Archives of Canada.) [1] Patriot (Charlottetown) 30 August 1887. [2] Royal Gazette (Charlottetown), 29 May 1856

Leaving their mark

by Maureen Coulter, Parks Canada

Students from Holland College's Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program are halfway through restoring two original windows from Province House National Historic Site

When Ethan Spenceley returns to Province House National Historic Site in the years to come, he will easily be able to point out the windows he helped restore while he was a student in the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program at Holland College.



Ethan Spenceley of Charlottetown says it has been a memorable experience taking part in restoring two original windows from Province House National Historic Site. Spenceley said he plans to return to Province House in the future to see his handiwork on display. Submitted

Spenceley is one of a dozen students in the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program who will be leaving their mark on this historic building by restoring two of the original windows at Province House.

The windows, located on the left hand side of the Richmond Street entrance, will be one of the first sights visitors will experience when the building reopens to the public in 2022.

"It's been really interesting and really cool to be behind the curtain of this massive project and to be able to point out a section of it, which I was able to put my hands on," said Spenceley.

The class began the conservation work in the fall of 2019 under the supervision of Josh Silver, Learning Manager for the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program.

So far, they have stripped the windows including the glass panes, the putty that holds the glass in place and the paint. They have also disassembled the bare wood frames to examine their condition further.

The windows are original to the building which was constructed in 1843. They measure four feet wide and are nine feet high, with 4 sashes and 12 panes.



Josh Silver, Learning Manager for the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program, says each piece of the original window frames from Province House National Historic Site has been meticulously catalogued. Submitted

Silver said the windows were in far better condition than they anticipated. It took about 30-50 person hours to disassemble the window frames while following strict standards and guidelines.

He said it appears some parts of the frames are rotten and this will require students to replace small portions of it using straight grain Douglas fir.

"If we didn't address that, then in another 100 years from now, that window wouldn't exist because the rot spreads, so we have to intervene," explained Silver. "We do that as minimally as possible, but when we do intervene, we have to do it in an appropriate fashion."

Silver said the engagement from his students has been "phenomenal" and that this has been an invaluable learning experience for them. "This is one of the best projects we've worked on," said Silver. "We are quite proud and excited about it."

Spenceley said the most memorable experience for him was when expert window conservator Octavio Salcedo with DFS Inc. gave a full day tutorial about what to do and what not to do when it comes to restoring historic windows.

He said he found the lesson informative and that it was a good day to be in the classroom.

"It was really interesting when he came in and spoke to us about the different species of wood and walked us through how they would all react and everything."

Silver said they are about halfway through the conservation work; however the project has been halted due to COVID-19.

"We are still meeting as a class, so we are doing activities online and lots of stuff through everybody's home, but that particular project requires a shop, so we just can't do the work at the moment."

Silver said it is likely a new class of students will be assembling the windows, which will provide additional students with an incredible learning opportunity.

The assembling process could take between 50-100 person hours and includes identifying what needs to be replaced, manufacturing that piece and installing it. They also have to rebuild the window frame and install the glass and putty before painting it.

The final phase would be re-installing it into Province House. Silver said this project is monumental for students in The Holland College Retrofit Carpentry program.

"We do windows and doors all the time for lots of places, but to be able to have a national caliber building," said Silver with a whistle. "This project will literally be on their resumes for the rest of their lives, it is that significant."



Pictured are some of the students from the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program at Holland College who are involved in restoring two of the original windows from Province House National Historic Site. Submitted