

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Visitor Centre/Museum

Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park
Aulac, New Brunswick

The Visitor Centre/Museum at Fort Beauséjour National Historic Park was constructed as a museum in 1936. The building footprint is now H-shaped, although originally the museum consisted only of the front entrance block. This original front portion was designed in the offices of the Department of Public Works. The link of the "H" was added in 1938 and the rear block in 1948. It is now owned by the Canadian Parks Service of Environment Canada. See Building Report 90-69.

Reason for Designation

This building was designated "Classified" because of the quality of its design and materials, its symbolic prominence within the region, as well as its thematic associations. Of great significance is its association with Dr. John Clarence Webster (1863-1950), an amateur historian who has been recognized nationally for his efforts in promoting the commemoration of Canadian history, particularly in the maritime provinces. Between 1923 and 1950, he was a member of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, serving as Chairman from 1945 to 1950. The construction of this museum is a direct result of his efforts.

The Beauséjour Museum is a very good example of a structure built during the 1930s to present and commemorate Canadian history, particularly the theme of French-British conflict. Under Webster's direction, it became a repository for material related not only to the fort, but also of regional civilian life. Additionally, the museum is one of the very best examples of the type of project implemented with funds made available by the Public Works Construction Act of 1934.

Although the immediate site around the building has been somewhat altered by the adjacent trailer, the site and setting including the fortification earthworks have remained almost unchanged since the construction of the museum. However, the original placement of the building within the area of the spur built by the British after 1755 has been the subject of some controversy since the excavation disturbed the integrity of the archaeological remains. Nevertheless, the museum is today the most prominent physical landmark in the park as the visitor approaches Fort Beauséjour.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Beauséjour Visitor Centre/Museum resides in its simplified Chateausque design, symmetrical massing, and the quality of the materials and craftsmanship. Although constructed in three phases, the overall effect is a unified composition since the design precedents established in the original 1936 front block

were continued during the subsequent additions of 1938 and 1948. Any future additions should carefully consider the symmetry, as well as the established design precedents.

The massing and detailing are derived from Chateausque design principles, albeit greatly simplified, and influenced by vernacular French architecture as reflected in the bellcast eaves. Elements of the Chateausque include the fortress-like appearance, the dominating, steeply pitched roof enlivened by gables, dormers and chimneys, the eaveline corbelling reminiscent of machicolations at the main entrance, and the contrasting use of rock-faced and smooth stone.

Fenestration is regular in rhythm, although varied in articulation, creating a semblance of asymmetry in an essentially symmetrical massing. Such elements include the off-centre entrance way, the gabled window bay, the roof dormers, and the two sizes of segmentally-arched windows. Any new openings should not disrupt the regular rhythm of the fenestration. Additionally, the multi-paned wood casement windows and wood panel doors with lights should be maintained. Consideration should be given to reconstructing the exterior wooden shutters.

The exterior walls are clad in randomly coursed, rock-faced Wallace sandstone with accents of smoothly dressed stone at the main door surround, corbels beneath the eaves, voussoirs of the segmentally arched windows, and the stringcourse beneath the windows. The batten metal roof is clad in copper. These two predominant exterior finishes should be maintained.

The building currently houses a museum, visitor centre and administrative offices. The interior plan has changed very little although, as previously, there are difficulties in accommodating these functions in terms of space.

Interior finishes are simple: plaster walls with wood casings and baseboards. The geometric cornice is of note with its plaster shields depicting roses, thistles, shamrocks, fleurs-de-lys and maple leaves.

The immediate site has not altered significantly although the eventual removal of the trailer and relocation of the public washrooms is recommended. Additionally, light fixtures more reflective of the building's character should be considered both inside and outside.

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

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