

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Blockhouse was built in Merrickville in 1832 by the British Ordnance Department to designs by Colonel John By. Used routinely as a lockmaster's residence and storehouse, it was a defensive structure designed to accommodate 50 men and was occupied briefly by troops during the 1837-38 Rebellion. At the turn of the century, due to structural problems, modifications to the roof and interior supports were undertaken. Restoration was carried out between 1962-65. The blockhouse is currently operated as a museum by the Merrickville and District Historical Society. The Canadian Parks Service is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 91-78.

Reasons for Designation

The Merrickville Blockhouse was designated Classified because it is a rare example of a blockhouse built to Colonel John By's original specifications with respect to functional design and materials. It is the largest of its type on the Rideau Canal and, by virtue of its imposing size and prominent location, is a regional landmark.

It was Colonel By's intention to construct blockhouses at each lockstation, but only four were completed. Of these, the Merrickville Blockhouse is the most elaborate. Located near both the lockstation and the canal bridge, the Merrickville Blockhouse was well placed to protect the canal from attack. It also served the local militia as a mustering point and supply depot for guns, ammunition, and provisions. Sergeant John Johnson, involved in the initial construction of the canal, served as lockmaster from 1836 to 1869, and drilled the local militia during the Rebellion. The town of Merrickville, a Loyalist settlement dating from the 1790s, was a commercial centre whose further growth and importance was stimulated by the canal construction.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Merrickville Blockhouse is defined by its aesthetic and functional design, the use of materials appropriate to its defensive purpose, and its contribution to the historic character of the town.

The blockhouse is a well-proportioned symmetrical two-storey pyramidal-roofed structure, fifty-one feet square at its base and approximately fifty-seven feet in height - one of the largest of its type surviving in Canada. Although the second-storey "bomb-proof" masonry infill was removed in 1909 for structural reasons, the blockhouse retains many of its original defense-related elements, including machicolations in the second-storey overhang, loopholes flanking the second-storey

.../2

Rideau Canal, Ontario
Blockhouse (Continued)

windows, part of the rubble-stone magazine located in the cellar, and a single elevated entrance reached by a platform over the dry moat as it was historically.

The materials were chosen to make the blockhouse secure and fireproof. The carefully constructed thick masonry first-floor walls and heavy hand-hewn second-storey knee braces attest to the craftsmanship of the period. Although the roof is now covered with wood shingles, as opposed to the original tin fireproof shingles, the walls of the second storey are covered with tin as they were originally. The interior was restored in the 1960s to approximate its appearance in the 1850s.

Surrounded by its original dry moat and retaining its original orientation to the canal, the blockhouse is a major element in the historic streetscape of Merrickville and is a symbol of the area. The historic building materials, and the character of the site and setting, should be carefully maintained and preserved.

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