

The Riel House was constructed in 1837 following vernacular Métis design. No known designer is associated with the house. In 1969, removals included two layers of siding, a porch, the front verandah, an addition that likely housed Joseph Riel's post office, both chimneys, a stairway and interior partitions. The house was designated a National Historic Site in 1975 and restored as closely as possible to its 1886 appearance in 1979-1980. It is used as a museum. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 99-057.

### Reasons for Designation

The Riel House was designated a "Recognized" Federal Heritage Building because of its historical associations, environmental values and its architectural qualities.

The Riel House is a rare surviving built resource representing Métis settlement of land in Canada, particularly of the "river lot" system adopted on the Red River in Manitoba. It is associated with the descendants of Gaboury-Lagimodière, Riel-Boucher, a very prominent Métis family in the region. Louis Riel's wake, an important event throughout the region, was held in the house. The house is a prominent building within the St. Vital community and was one of the larger homes on River Road. It is the only surviving example of a Métis home from the historical period, still located on its original "river lot" site.

The scale of the Riel House is compatible with its residential neighbourhood. Although it does not establish the character of the area, the house within its large, open site enhances its surroundings. The house is well known both within the City of Winnipeg and within the broader Métis community.

The Riel House is a restored example of an 1880s era vernacular Métis structure. The building features balanced, largely symmetrical elevations and has a clean, unornamented character. It has a typical three-room ground floor layout, which has been reconstructed from physical evidence. The Red River framing of the structure is not exposed but largely intact and very stable.

### Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Riel House resides in its massing, scale, roof profiles, proportions, construction materials, structure, window and door pattern and environmental setting.

While the existing Riel House strongly resembles the building as it stood in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building did not evolve over time to this state. The house's present

appearance is due largely to construction done in 1979-80. Alterations of the building over time, demonstrating the house's evolution, have been erased. Accordingly, any remaining ghost marks on floors left by walls or furniture, giving evidence of the interior's previous arrangements, should be kept and protected. Heritage value lies in the consistency of the reconstruction and so this should be respected. When repairs and replacements become necessary, they should be based on a clear understanding of the intent behind the 1979-80 reconstruction.

The Riel House has an L-shaped plan formed by the rectangular, one-and-one-half storey main house and the small, one storey annex placed perpendicular to the main house at its northeast corner. It is believed the annex was used as a summer kitchen. The house's basic massing, form, structural and architectural design correspond typically to 19<sup>th</sup> century French Métis residential forms and specifically to Red River frame Métis houses. The essence of the house's plan is important to its heritage character and should be protected.

The house and the annex are covered with cove siding painted white. Green wooden shutters adorn windows on the ground floor. The pitched roofs of both the main building and annex are typical of the building's time and complement its functional style. The roofs are covered with wood shingles. The choice of new materials or finishes for any future replacement or resurfacing of the roof or walls should correspond to the 1979-80 reconstruction.

The symmetrical exterior appearance of the building is largely achieved through the ordering of windows and doors. Entrances and openings combine functionality, basic proportion and straightforward style with simple detailing. The main entrance is centrally located on the west façade and is flanked on each side by sash windows divided into four rows of three lights. An entrance door exists on the south side of the annex and a window punctures its north side. All windows are capped by a pedimented top sill. The house's south façade has two equally-sized, symmetrically placed windows on both the ground and attic storeys, while the north façade has two windows at the attic level and a single smaller window on one side of the ground floor.

The traditional French Canadian construction method used for the Riel House is called *pièce-sur-pièce de charpente* or *poteau sur sole*. It is known as Red River frame in Western Canada. At the Riel House, a dressed timber frame structure with grooved upright logs is filled with tongue-ended logs placed horizontally between the vertical frame. Spaces between logs are filled with chinking. The Red River frame is one of the only remaining original elements of the building. All remaining portions of the Red River frame construction should be maintained and protected.

The house originally sat on a fieldstone foundation. Presently, the main building's foundations are either of fieldstone or are faced with fieldstone, while the annex rests on either a wooden sill or concrete slab foundation.

Although the original interior layout remains uncertain, new partitions and finishes were introduced, respecting the original utilitarian quality of the interior. The reconstructed stairway is an interesting interior feature. Any changes to the interior should seek to retain the intended functional nature of interior spaces and finishes, as set out in the 1979-80 reconstruction.

The Riel House is set within a suburban neighbourhood along with a large, open site. Although its landscape features mimic historic practices (including a vegetable garden and a field), the landscape should continue to evolve to reflect the period to which the house has been restored based on documented evidence. Appropriate screening which will diminish the impact of the suburban setting and the modern interventions of parking lot and amphitheatre should be continued and enhanced. Vestiges of the river lot appearance and mature trees contribute to the site's heritage character and should be protected. Any opportunities to further accentuate the house's relationship to the river and, in particular, its original long and narrow lot configuration, should be instituted.

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

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Revised