

Fort Walsh National Historic Park
Commissioner's Residence/Building No. 1
Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Commissioner's Residence was built in 1943 to a design prepared by the RCMP in Ottawa, possibly with the assistance of the Department of Public Works. Refinements to the basic design were made on site by the chief logman/site foreman and the then commissioner Stuart Taylor Wood. Various alterations have been made to the building by the Canadian Parks Service since 1972, to bring it into closer conformity with the conjectural appearance of the former Irvine Building which stood in the same general area. The original annex was demolished c1 977 to permit the reconstruction of an 1880's period palisade on its original trace. A new annex, in closer conformity with the conjectural appearance of a kitchen wing on the former Irvine Building, was constructed in 1983. The entrance porch and roof covering of the main building have been similarly re-worked. The building is the property of the Environment Canada Parks Service. See Building Report 88-68.

Reasons for Designation

The Commissioner's Residence was designated Recognized mainly for its historical associations and environmental qualities.

The Commissioner's Residence was one of the first "historic shells" built at Fort Walsh to house the operational requirements of the remount station as well as give the outward appearance of an older building. Between 1943 and 1951 it was occupied by ranch employees involved in the day to day operation of the ranch. From 1951 to the early 1960s the building was used by Stuart Wood as a retirement residence. The long occupancy of the Commissioner's Residence by RCMP personnel involved in the remount station operation, qualifies it as a very good illustration of the symbolic importance of the Mounted Police in 20th century Canada and the attention placed on the force's equestrian tradition. The building is directly linked with Stuart Taylor Wood, former commissioner of the RCMP, who selected the site of the remount station, negotiated its purchase and guided its design. Beyond the high profile normally associated with his position as head of the force, Wood initiated numerous projects which reflected his keen interest in the history and traditions of the Mounted Police.

The good aesthetic qualities of the building and its identification with the Assistant Commissioner A.G. Irvine give it a distinctive landmark status within the Fort complex.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Commissioner's Residence resides in the features of the building related to its occupation by ranch employees and retired commissioner Stuart Taylor Wood. It also resides in its deliberate hierarchical setting within the complex.

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The Commissioner's Residence, as constructed in 1943, clearly borrowed from the rustic style, popularized in Canada's National Parks. The regularity of the log diameters, the gable and purlin log construction, the fully intersecting cross walls and the dominant field-stone fireplace are all indicative of the style. In the interests of economy, sawn red cedar shingles, factory made window units and off-the-shelf hardware were used.

In an attempt to better recapture the character of the Fort as it appeared in the 1880s, a number of alterations, detrimental to the heritage character of the building have recently been made, namely: the replacement of the original shingle roof finish by boarding, the removal of the field-stone fireplace and hardwood flooring, and the replacement of the palisade log/stave constructed porch. Consequently, surviving fabric with some links to former remount station personnel or to Commissioner Wood has been seriously reduced. The concrete foundations, log walls, and roof purlins may be all that remains from the 1940s period. Further alterations would severely jeopardize its present heritage status.

The special position that the Commissioner's Residence occupies within the Fort (at a distance from the men's barracks and outbuildings and separated by a wide lawn from the parade square) is undoubtedly a concession which was made in the past, in recognition of the rank and importance of the occupant. The historic relationship between surviving remount station buildings and their associated landscape should be retained.

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