EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses a number of issues pertaining to human resources (HR) in preservation, specifically the restoration, rehabilitation, maintenance and repair of our built heritage and conservation of historic sites. During the last three decades, a workforce of built heritage preservation professionals and trades people has emerged in Canada. Even after thirty or more years of accomplishments, however, the cohort of trades and professional heritage conservation workers is not adequately recognized or understood.

This situation needs to be rectified, not least because of the potential future demand for skilled workers and the threat to our remaining built heritage if we do not meet this demand. If we use the conservative estimate that 10% of pre-1941 buildings possess heritage value, then there are approximately 128,000 residential properties with heritage value that require ongoing maintenance, repair and preservation work. The materials and characteristics of this older building stock are fundamentally different from newer stock.

Evidence suggests that there is unmet demand for staff with heritage skills in both the trades and the professions. A number of studies point to the emerging importance of work in repair, renovation and restoration. With its distinct working conditions and skills requirements, further analysis of contractors, workers and training in this area is required.

Education, training, and certification—trends, gaps and needs

The Heritage Canada Foundation’s (HCF) survey of educational institutions and subsequent research discovered that the offerings at both the university and college/vocational level are limited. The multidisciplinary nature of built heritage preservation is reflected in the range of university departments and faculties amongst which heritage-related courses are scattered. There are only a few dedicated programs, however, and what little university training occurs exists almost exclusively within the framework of advanced studies. Two colleges provide training in heritage trades as the primary focus of a program, one of which is in its first year. Two others have been identified that include heritage as a component or add-on.

The need for heritage education in the planning professions, in addition to architecture, is vital. If people in positions of planning, policy and program creation at the municipal, as well as provincial and federal levels do not have knowledge of, or at least sensitivity to, heritage matters, then the climate for conservation suffers. More generally, an awareness of heritage preservation that begins at the elementary and high school level would encourage a culture of conservation. Raising awareness at this time in a child’s life through such means as HCF’s educational package, which it sends to thousands of schools across Canada each year, could spawn a generation sensitive to and vocal about the importance of our built heritage.

Because work on heritage buildings requires some distinct skills from more general renovation work, widely integrating heritage skills training with contemporary trades training is a prudent system for both students and employers. Inclusion of heritage sensitivity in the requirements for certification at the provincial and possibly at the national (i.e., Red Seal) level, too, could be explored. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) recognizes that Canada’s housing stock represents an “enormous pool of private capital,” and renovation choices have a direct impact on the integrity, longevity and performance of these homes. Accordingly, the strong influence contractors have on building owners’ decisions underscores the need for widespread heritage sensitivity in the trades as well as the professions. As one heritage trades educator pointed out: “our graduates can explain to their clients the difference between renovation and restoration.”

Apprenticeship is integral to the development of a skilled pool of human resources in many sectors of the economy. Concern about apprenticeship is felt throughout the building industry. A review of research initiatives on training and apprenticeship reveals key issues facing the building trades that centre on an imminent shortage of skilled tradespeople, and problems related to market volatility, which is less pronounced in the renovation than the new construction market.

Preservationists emphasize the importance of maintenance and repair of the existing building stock. Often requiring only modest means, it is more important than many a luxury rehabilitation. Moreover, regular inspections result in the avoidance of major repairs to buildings.

A knowledgeable workforce that could undertake a strong inspection and maintenance program would relieve the emergency mentality that often exists amongst owners and site guardians. It was readily apparent throughout a major study of heritage structures in Ontario that most major restoration work could have been avoided had regular inspections taken place and small problems been addressed as they occurred.

Defining built heritage

The work of those involved in the preservation of heritage buildings is not well recognized in Canada. Built heritage
has only a tenuous connection with
the concepts of "culture" and "heritage"
and it is therefore often overlooked
in the definitions of these. Second, in
terms of industry and the labour force,
heritage preservation work is often
subsumed in the larger context of
"renovation" or "building trade". The
widely used North American Industrial
Classification System (NAICS) includes
classifications for historical sites,
museums and similar institutions, but
these categories do not account for most
of the work of heritage preservation,
which is undertaken in the private
sector. Similarly, the National
Occupation Classification System
(NOC) does not disaggregate at a
level that is useful for understanding
human resources in built heritage
preservation, by providing categories
such as "heritage architect", "heritage
planner" or "heritage mason."

Definitions are essential in qualifying
how built heritage is explicitly included
or excluded from broader sectors such as
"culture", "heritage" and "the renovation
industry". In turn, if built heritage is
excluded from official definitions of
heritage, for example, data collection,
policy creation, and public and private
sector actions that affect built heritage
subsequently suffer.

Data availability, collection
and analysis—gaps and needs

Data on the entire enterprise of preserving
heritage buildings is extremely limited.
The complexity of the built heritage
sector and the challenge in defining,
classifying and collecting data on the
built heritage preservation industry
is not unique. Very recently, the burgeoning
environment sector was in much
the same position. Attempts had been
made to identify environmental goods
and services in existing classifications,
but without appreciable success.
Statistics Canada received funding from
Industry Canada to develop a national
statistical database on the industry,
and began a program consisting of
new surveys, modifications to existing
surveys and integration of statistics
from various components of its
economic statistics framework. Similarly,
the Cultural Statistics Program (CSP)
at Statistics Canada was established
in 1972 in response to difficulties asso-
ciated with data in the culture sector.
There is an acknowledged gap in the
data required to adequately understand
the built heritage preservation field.
Data is needed for descriptive analyses,
planning, understanding the role and
contribution of built heritage to the
economy, and monitoring.

A review of Statistics Canada's latest
Draft Framework for Culture Statistics
(FCS) largely excludes built heritage
from its definition of culture. The FCS
states that the culture output is the
plan; therefore, construction of the
building or the building itself is not
part of the culture infrastructure of
interest, or considered a culture product.
Given this definition, architects,
planners and the like, of highways,
airports, land subdivisions, commercial,
institutional and residential buildings,
are part of the culture industry, as are
individuals primarily engaged in
developing plans for renovation;
however, a highly skilled carpenter or
stonemason is not. Built heritage in
some other countries is not so excluded
from cultural statistics. The FCS
acknowledges that further work needs
to be initiated on defining which occu-
pations should be identified as culture.

The Government of Canada recently
recognized the need to deepen its
commitment to ensure that Canadians
will be able to enjoy their rich built
heritage, most notably through the
Historic Places Initiative (HPI). Part
of the HPI is the establishment of a
national heritage register, and Statistics
Canada officials did suggest that, once
it is operational, the register could
provide an important base from which
these buildings could be surveyed and
monitored. Despite the current lack
of funds for new data initiatives at
Statistics Canada, during recent com-
munications with officials it was also
pointed out that, if the proposed tax
incentives offered by the federal
Government come to fruition, Statistics
Canada might then be able to provide
measures of the activity associated with
the heritage building stock.

Special data requests are also available
from Statistics Canada on a cost-recovery
basis. In addition to data mining,
possibilities include the addition of
a question to an existing survey, and
specialized research projects (surveys
or statistical analysis). There may also
be unexplored promise in obtaining
data from building and construction
surveys. In the future, however,
emphasis needs to be placed on the
fact that renovation without regard
for heritage bears little relation to
restoration or rehabilitation. To benefit
data collection in the heritage preserva-
tion field, this distinction could be
made in studies of the construction
industry, the carpentry and masonry
trades, and training programs.

By assessing evidence from a number
of sources, one can begin to cobble
together a picture of human resources
in the heritage preservation field. Still,
we have neither systematically collected
data, nor a national built heritage
human resources strategy. There are
signs of a growing awareness that
heritage buildings and HR issues are
a distinct and important sub-sector
that needs to be addressed. Future
development of an HR strategy for
built heritage preservationists would
place built heritage alongside the many
other sectors in which the development
of human resources has been recognized
as essential to the future well-being of
Canada, and by so doing we would help
safeguard Canada's heritage buildings.