

Repairs to Runciman House: The “Prettiest House” in Nova Scotia

In 2001, Heritage Canada undertook a conservation condition assessment of Runciman House, our picturesque property located in historic Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, to avoid the pitfalls associated with quick-fix repairs often undertaken with heritage buildings.



Built in 1817 for Reverend John Millidge, the house was designed by Boston architect Charles Bullfinch in a Regency cottage style. The house retains its original clapboard exterior and windows and much of its fine architectural detailing.

The growing need for repair work led the foundation to prepare a long-term plan for the restoration and future maintenance of the house, its distinctive garage and the landscape that surrounds them. The architectural conservation firm of G. F. Duffus & Company Ltd. of Halifax prepared a detailed assessment of the property in 2001 with recommendations for its conservation.

In 2002-2003, interior work to address problems with mould was completed, repairs to the dated sewer system were done and a new fire and safety security system was installed.

The following year, an extensive roofing project, which included work to eaves and gutters, was undertaken. A new historically correct cedar shingle roof was installed. At the same time, the chimneys were repaired, reparged and new flue liners were inserted.



Before the new shingles were layed, the house's curved wooden gutters, which had rotted in several areas, were replaced. The contractor used a shipwright skilled in steaming wood to match the particular curve of the eaves. To extend the life of the replicas, they have been lined with metal.

In order to expedite the work, the fascia boards and soffits were removed, revealing joinery work in the overhanging rafters that had badly rotted. When repair work was insufficient, replicas were installed using mortise and tenon joinery in keeping with the original workmanship.

This year, work continues on the exterior with repairs to the front portico railing and finials and the unique eyebrow window above the garage doors.