

Creating New Opportunities For Heritage Conservation: A Provincial View of the Canadian Register of Historic Places

by Ian Hall

Editor's Note: In the last issue of Heritage "Connecting Heritage Sites Across the Country" introduced the new Canadian Register of Historic Places (www.historicplaces.ca). The Heritage Canada Foundation has supported the development of this initiative since its inception and we are committed to raising awareness about this online catalogue of designated heritage sites.

This time we bring you the provincial/territorial perspective on the Register from the Manitoba Historic Resources Branch.

It is exciting to be part of the process of building an Internet site that promises to have Canada's historic places at your fingertips. The Canadian Register of Historic Places was developed by Parks Canada as part of the Historic Places Initiative, the program that underpins the Register and aims to support the identification and conservation of Canada's historic places.

Our staff in Manitoba, together with Canada's other provinces and territories, are currently nominating historic places for inclusion in the Register. As well, we promote the Register to municipalities, property owners, heritage groups and others.

From the provincial/territorial perspective, the Register (remembering that it is still early days) provides both short term and long term opportunities in the heritage conservation sector.

SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

Parks Canada and its provincial and territorial partners have been promoting the Register as a tool for researching and learning about Canada's past and as a means to promote our heritage sites. Because the Register is only partially completed, cataloguing approximately 2,000 of Canada's 17,000 designated sites so far, its usefulness is limited. But the number of sites included on the Register is quickly growing so its educational and promotional benefits will be delivered in the near term.

In fact, the Register already seems to be having a positive effect in Manitoba. The organization that markets bed and breakfasts in Manitoba is very enthusiastic about using the Register to promote the heritage characteristics of many of its members' guesthouses. The proprietor of a heritage church-turned-teahouse told me that "it's about time" a profile-raising tool like the Register was created to educate Canadians about their historic places.

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

For the provinces and territories the greater value of the Register will emerge in the longer term, once it is used with other Historic Places Initiative (HPI) tools including:

1. Information (the Canadian Register of Historic Places);
2. Conservation guidance (the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada); and
3. Conservation incentives — the Commercial Heritage Properties Incentive Fund (CHPIF). This fund has been tagged for possible conversion from a grant program to a federal tax credit program.

As site owners, municipalities and heritage professionals become acquainted with all of these tools, the value of the Register will increase. Together, they provide practical resources to support good conservation projects.

opportunities for manitoba The Register creates opportunities for the provinces and territories and the municipalities with which they are collaborating. These opportunities may vary or differ in their relative priority from the federal government's goals. However, rather than being a problem, this difference allows federal, provincial and territorial partners to make the Initiative worthwhile for themselves and their stakeholder clients.

From Manitoba's perspective, the Register creates three key opportunities:

1. Building and enhancing relationships with heritage stakeholders.
2. Strengthening the profile of heritage and heritage conservation.
3. Opportunities for intergovernmental collaboration.

BUILDING AND ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS WITH HERITAGE STAKEHOLDERS

You may have already had contact with the Canadian Register of Historic Places. If so, very likely it was through a provincial or territorial government, or a municipal government engaged by the province or territory. From the provincial/territorial perspective the Canadian Register requires us to reach out and engage our stakeholders so they understand the intended use of Statements of Significance and the process of nominating sites to the Register.

[A Statement of Significance documents the range of heritage values associated with a particular place. It includes aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual values. It captures what is of heritage significance and defines the reasons for the place being designated a heritage site. It is very important because it often determines those elements of a place that must be preserved in order for the site's heritage value to be maintained.]

In Manitoba the province has taken a leadership role in preparing Statements of Significance and nominating sites on behalf of consenting owners and municipalities. During our contact with stakeholders (which always includes a personal site visit) we share information about the HPI tools and provincial programs. We also find out how these tools and programs can help owners and communities.

We also discuss conservation issues and strategies related to the site. Sometimes these are simple things such as providing advice to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Garson, Manitoba on sympathetic window replacement and on which provincial programs may be able to provide financial assistance. Sometimes more substantial issues are addressed such as the industrial impacts from neighbouring properties on the Oakbank, Manitoba Speer House site and working with the Minnedosa Agricultural Society on the proposed relocation of its threatened Agricultural Display Building.

This interaction is even more beneficial for undesignated sites (which have no heritage protection) who contact us because of interest in designation and nomination to the Register, as in the case of the undesignated sites at Flin Flon and Fort Alexander.

Without the need to contact owners and municipalities about the Register it is unlikely we would have reasons or resources to do this valuable outreach. The Register creates the opportunity for discussion. In addition to one-on-one site visits, we have also completed workshops with stakeholders, including municipal governments, in all regions of the province.

While different models are being used across Canada to get sites listed on to the Register, developing the Register is always an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with local heritage communities.

STRENGTHENING THE PROFILE OF HERITAGE AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Building the Register impacts a wide range of Canadians. Stakeholders get involved and the profile of heritage and heritage conservation in Canada is strengthened.

The Register will be the single access point for Canadian heritage conservation. It will offer a diversity of sites with varying levels of significance — even multiple points of view for sites with multiple designations, in the case of sites which have been designated by more than one level of government, sometimes for different reasons, as in the case of Winnipeg's Exchange District. This inclusiveness is a first for heritage in Canada and makes the Register the reference point for information on historic places in Canada.

There is a notable caveat to this feat of inclusiveness. Currently, because the Register is publicly available on the Internet and provides detailed site locations, it is not able to include many sensitive or sacred First Nations sites which could be threatened by vandalism or other forms of damage from visitors. However, the Government of Canada is working towards creating other tools (complementing HPI) which will be more responsive to recognizing and conserving Aboriginal culture and which will help to address a critical gap in Manitoba.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Provinces and territories are now actively sharing information about heritage conservation within their jurisdictions. This occurred prior to the launch of the Register, of course, but the Register (and HPI, more generally) creates a forum for this sharing and defines a vocabulary and standard set of processes and tools.

Provinces and territories, under provincial/territorial legislation, have been effective catalysts for the creation of a community conservation ethic. The Historic Places Initiative is a means of exchanging information on our heritage conservation practices and a new platform for continued support for preservation. For provinces and territories, the HPI platform supports this culture creation; it has spawned a common language, many common goals and opportunities for ongoing communication.

For instance, Manitoba's Historic Resources Branch recently collaborated with heritage staff from other Western provinces to jointly promote registered sites along the Yellowhead Highway. Similar co-operative work is occurring between the province of Manitoba and municipalities engaged in projects that use HPI tools to address local heritage priorities.

These are just small collaborations, but continued cooperation should result in benefits that extend beyond the Register and support broader heritage conservation goals. These goals include designating and protecting a greater number and range of historic places, technical and financial support for good conservation work and creating the foundation of a culture of conservation.

CAPITALIZING ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE REGISTER

Perhaps because of its tangibility and broad audience, very high expectations have been placed on the Register. This single tool is supposed to supply meaningful information to students, site owners, local governments, heritage professionals, planners and a host of others. In order to accomplish this and capitalize on the potential of the Register, it needs resources commensurate with expectations. Federal, provincial and territorial governments must not lose sight of the longer-term benefits that the Register can

bring as a part of an effective system of heritage conservation tools and incentives.

In Manitoba, considerable effort has been put into making the most out of the engagement opportunity provided by the Register and into creating Statements of Significance which are interesting to read but also extremely useful and workable for guiding conservation. These investments in quality are a good starting point, but require ongoing support in order to generate lasting value.

Continuing support for the Historic Places Initiative in Manitoba could help the province provide advisory services to existing and prospective heritage sites and communities. It would also help provide training for site owners, community heritage advisors and heritage professionals on conservation theory and management of heritage value.

Ian Hall works for the Manitoba Historic Resources Branch and is the municipal liaison officer for the Historic Places Initiative.