

HERITAGE CANADA FOUNDATION: CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF HELPING CANADIANS KEEP HISTORIC PLACES ALIVE

by Lori Anglin and Natalie Bull

“On Monday, April 2, 1973, the formal announcement of our launch was made on Parliament Hill in the historic Privy Council Chamber of the East Block. The cheque for our first year’s budget was handed over and instantly deposited so as not to miss a day’s interest. We were on our way.” - R.A.J. (Bob) Phillips, HCF executive director (1973 to 1978)



It was the tenacity of an active few that led to the creation of a national body committed to the preservation of Canada’s heritage. Widespread government support eventually followed, and in 1973 the Heritage Canada Foundation (HCF) was launched. It was an important outcome of the “identityshaping” period of Canada’s Centennial celebrations, which had focused Canadians on the values of the past as never before.

A National Trust with a Difference

The Heritage Canada Foundation was created as a national trust with a federal endowment and Crown Trustee status. The foundation (the term “National Trust” had been trademarked by a financial institution) was mandated to:

“...preserve and demonstrate and to encourage the preservation and demonstration of the nationally significant historic, architectural, natural and scenic heritage of Canada with a view to stimulating and promoting the interest of the people of Canada in that heritage.”

The founding board of ten governors included leading Canadians like Hartland MacDougall and Pierre Berton.



Because Canada was late in creating a national trust, the new board members were able to learn from other mature national trusts worldwide. With help from staff they looked at conservation organizations in 36 countries as well as existing programs and policies here at home.

What they found was that Canada already had a world-class system of parks and laws to protect the country’s natural landscapes, with agencies like Parks Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada leading the charge. Yet there was very little in place at the national level, as compared to other countries studied, to ensure the protection of the **built** environment.



Heritage Canada Commemorative Plaque

Many buildings across Canada bear this plaque, indicating that HCF intervened to purchase, invest in or apply protective covenants to the property.

Based on these findings, HCF focused on the preservation of heritage buildings and historic places. The board of governors was also explicit in stating that the organization would define a role for itself that would complement, and not compete with, the work of existing heritage groups. And instead of creating a national trust predicated on a collection of preserved house museums or tourist attractions, HCF

launched an innovative program of Area Conservation that invested in individual buildings and groups of buildings in order to attract private investment and spark the revitalization of entire communities.

The board also believed that in a country as large as Canada, the tide of widespread demolition and neglect could never be turned by simply acquiring a collection of historic sites.

HCF's Property Program

The Yukon Hotel in Dawson City is just one of 75 heritage properties that benefited from HCF acquisition or investment. Another is the Hertz-O'Halloran Row on George Street in Charlottetown, just a block south of Province House. "It was the first time that large amounts of money were committed to heritage restoration. And let me tell you—after that, people started to sit up and take notice," remembered long-time P.E.I. heritage activist Catherine Hennessey. HCF's current collection of five properties in three provinces includes two held in trust for the federal Crown.



In 1975, the Area Conservation program invested in Newfoundland's capital city of St. John's to stem the tide of destruction resulting from a bulldozer-era urban renewal project.

"The Area Conservation program will result in streetscape preservation of a district which will help retain and enhance the character of the area, greatly increasing its tourist potential and its attractiveness for commercial enterprises," wrote Shannie Duff, then HCF governor for Newfoundland. Even more important it will preserve for all the citizens of St. John's an oasis of familiarity where they can go back and touch their roots."

Other Area Conservation projects benefited places like St. Andrews-By- The-Sea, New Brunswick, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, Barclay Square in Vancouver, The Winnipeg Exchange District and Old Strathcona in Edmonton.

HCF's Area Conservation Program

Edmonton's Old Strathcona area faced possible destruction in the 1960s in favour of a freeway. The boom town-era neighbourhood became one of the first participants in HCF's Area Conservation Program in 1974. Today, the Old Strathcona Area Community Council is active in promoting a vibrant, people-oriented destination that takes pride in its significant heritage assets.



The Area Conservation pilot morphed into the very successful Main Street Canada program in 1979. Its purpose was to help revitalize the central core of small and mediumsized towns, and at the same time preserve their historic buildings.

"Our task was to mobilize the growing reaction to the unthinking construction boom of the postwar years ... we are watching the pendulum swing in favour of preservation," stated Pierre Berton, chair of HCF at the time.

Main Street Then... and Now

"Recently a colleague asked, 'What comes after a Main Street program?' Fort Macleod, Alberta's 25-year-old Main Street office is proof that the process never ends. It can't. These places help define our identity, our sense of place. They should and can remain viable for generations. We can all play a role in ensuring that they do."

- Jim Mountain, first coordinator of the Fort Macleod Main Street office.



By 1991 Main Street Canada operated in every province and territory. Seventy communities had taken part and achieved remarkable success: thousands of jobs, new businesses, and more than \$90 million in private investment.

Main Street Canada spawned ongoing programs in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec— and even inspired the creation of a Main Street program in Australia.

The national program wound down in the early 1990s when the federal government's contribution ended. HCF entered into a partnership with La fondation Rues principales to continue the Main Street legacy in the province of Quebec.



National Heritage Awards Program

HCF confers National Heritage Awards created in collaboration with His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Madame Gabrielle Léger, and Canada's Lieutenant Governors.

The program recognizes and celebrates excellence in heritage conservation.



Engaging Canadians in Celebrating and Visiting Historic Places

Building awareness and advocacy have always been core HCF activities. A range of programs has developed over the years to raise awareness about heritage and to engage Canadians.

Heritage Magazine

HCF has published a bilingual quarterly magazine continuously since 1973.

Historic Sites

HCF holds a modest portfolio of historic properties and collections open to the public. HCF members benefit from reciprocal agreements that allow them free access to national trust properties in Australia, England, Scotland, Wales and the U.S.



Doors Open Canada

Launched in 2002, Doors Open Canada recognizes the potential for increasing Canadians' understanding and enjoyment of their local architectural environment while encouraging awareness of their built heritage.

Heritage Day

HCF leads the nation in celebrating Heritage Day on the 3rd Monday in February each year.



Strengthening the Heritage Sector

Since its first conference in Ottawa in 1974, HCF has always recognized the value of bringing people together to talk, learn and exchange. To build on the conference experience and to rally and connect heritage groups and advocates across the country, it organized the Canadian Heritage Network in 1982. Today, the Built Heritage Leadership Forum represents a return to that early networking strategy.

The Built Heritage Leadership Forum

A group of leaders from province- and territorywide heritage organizations is evolving as a new opportunity for exchange, networking and continuing education. It's also stimulating collective action to influence public policy.

The world wide web has revolutionized the way people connect. Thousands of Canadians now receive **HCF Communiqués** and stay connected through the organization's website.



In 2007 HCF launched a new way to connect and protect: **AGORA-L** is a free, email-based tool for discussing issues and exchanging ideas about heritage conservation in Canada. Members connect with peers across the country and share questions and solutions without ever leaving their desks. **AGORA-L** is quickly becoming a source of success stories and advice.

Annual Conferences

HCF conferences provide the opportunity for a national perspective and a national conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing historic places and their owners, managers and advocates.

Young Canada Works

YCW gives students and recent graduates the opportunity to acquire valuable work skills and experience in the field of heritage, as well as help heritage organizations complete important projects. HCF distributes program funds on behalf of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Community Revitalization

HCF's subsidiary, La fondation Rues principales, has been delivering expertise in community revitalization and socio-economic revitalization since 1984, and more than 150 cities and towns have benefited. Currently, the Rues principales network encompasses nearly 50 municipalities.



Main Street Community Revitalization

La fondation Rues principales, a subsidiary of the Heritage Canada Foundation, continues to help hundreds of communities in Quebec and New Brunswick make heritage conservation a vital tool for economic development. From 1997 to 2002, its Main Street approach has benefited more than 700 historic buildings, and generated more than 1,200 new jobs, 360 new businesses, \$31 million in public investment and \$98 million in private investment. www.fondationruesprincipales.qc.ca

Saving Places

The Heritage Canada Foundation takes a multi-pronged approach to helping Canadians keep historic places alive: awarenessbuilding programs like the National Heritage Awards, Heritage Day and Doors Open are celebratory in nature, but threatened buildings need a different kind of attention.

Three years ago, the Heritage Canada Foundation began the tradition of announcing an annual Endangered Places List, calling Canadians' attention to the 10 most endangered historic places on our national radar screen. The list is a powerful tool for attracting media attention and for strengthening the resolve of local groups and officials working to find a solution.

South House Preserved!

Included on HCF's 2005 Top Ten Endangered Places List, South House is a picturesque 150-year-old Gothic Revival-style house on the grounds of the historic Rothesay Netherwood School in New Brunswick. Its preservation was the result of the tireless commitment of alumni, community members and local groups. The national attention that HCF brought to the cause added to the pressure placed on the school's board of governors to find a way to save South House.

The Save South House Committee organized campaigns, sought and received injunctions to prevent demolition, and then found a cooperative approach with the board of governors in finding a restoration solution. In the end, the board of governors agreed to a compromise proposal to save the original section of the house without its later additions. The committee then launched an incredible campaign to raise \$400,000 toward its restoration.

Each endangered place tells a unique story. But many share one or more root causes, and it is these common issues that have helped to shape and focus HCF's public policy advocacy efforts.

Protecting Railway Stations

From 1982 to 1988 HCF worked tirelessly to see The Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act become law.

Changing the System

In 1974, HCF developed a "Brown Paper on Legislation." Its three major recommendations called for a Canadian Register of Heritage Property, adequate provincial laws to protect listed property, and federal-provincial programs to give financial aid to the owners of heritage property. This became a blueprint for subsequent HCF work on building codes, recycling, mortgage financing and tax incentives for heritage buildings.

Since its inception, HCF has researched and advocated tax measures to put historic buildings on a level playing field with new construction in the eyes of developers. The U.S. federal rehabilitation tax credit, introduced in 1976, has encouraged the rehabilitation of over 31,000 historic properties, representing over \$31 billion in private investment.

In 1999, Parks Canada launched the Historic Places Initiative, a federal/provincial/ territorial collaboration designed to promote the conservation of Canada's built heritage. A key element was the Commercial Heritage Properties Incentive Fund (CHPIF), a \$30-million pilot contribution program modelled on the U.S.

rehabilitation tax credit. CHPIF successfully demonstrated the impact a modest federal incentive could have in stimulating private investment in historic places. A total of \$21.5 million spread across the first 49 projects leveraged more than eight times that amount in private sector investment, giving empty, derelict buildings vibrant new uses.

Recently, HCF has moved to a more public campaign around the need for tax incentives. Working with representatives of local heritage groups and developing accessible electronic petitions, a wider and more vocal constituency has emerged. Over the past two years provincial and territorial ministers responsible for culture and heritage, along with seven major municipalities (including Vancouver and Toronto) have passed resolutions supporting the call for federal financial incentives to encourage private sector investment in the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

Online petition

HCF members and supporters participated in an online petition calling for financial incentives to encourage the rehabilitation of historic buildings that might otherwise end up as landfill.

The Next 35 Years

The Heritage Canada Foundation's mandate has always seemed enormous, given the complex legal, financial, political and physical environment within which historic places exist. The present and the future require an even larger view. To address the most pressing new challenge of our time, HCF will align itself even more closely with the environmental movement. Recognizing that historic places are part of a continuum of existing buildings, old and new, HCF will contribute to creating a sustainable future by helping Canadians make "landmarks, not landfill" over the next 35 years.