

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

SUMMARY

Stornoway was built in 1913-14 to the designs of Ottawa architect Allen Keefer. It was Recognized because it is directly associated with eight leaders of the Opposition in Parliament, because the relationship between the building and its landscape has remained unchanged; and because its setting reinforces the character of the area.

HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Rockcliffe Park was from its inception a prestigious neighbourhood and clearly a desirable area in which to build a house in a semi-rural setting in the early 1900s. This house, built by Ascanio Major whose father had founded a wholesale grocery business in the Byward Market area of Ottawa in 1889, was among the first of the large and handsome permanent residences constructed in the area. In 1923 the house was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. I. Robertson and Mrs. Robertson named their new house "Stornoway" in memory of her grandmother who came from Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Following the German invasion of The Netherlands in May 1940 Crown Princess Juliana and her family escaped initially to England and then to Canada. She rented Stornoway from December 1942 until her return to The Netherlands in July 1945. In the late 1940s, at the time that the Government of Canada was preparing 24 Sussex Drive for use as the official residence of the prime minister, it was suggested that there should also be a residence for the leader of the opposition. A trust was set up to purchase Stornoway and administer the running of the house. By 1969 the trust, funded by contributions from the public, found it increasingly difficult to maintain the house appropriately and the Government of Canada purchased it on 1 January 1970. Stornoway reflects both the changing nature and the continuity of tradition in Rockcliffe Park: it dates from the first major pre-First World War building push in Rockcliffe; it was expanded in the 1920s when many of the village's finest houses were built; and it became an official Government residence when other large Rockcliffe Park houses were being purchased as official residences for foreign diplomats.

ARCHITECTURE

Stornoway was designed as a two and one half storey wooden house sheathed in stucco, with a hipped side gable roof and hipped dormers, a central door and symmetrical fenestration. The house has a strong horizontal emphasis, its two stories demarcated by a narrow raised stucco string course. All detailing was of the simplest nature, with bracketed wooden window shades above the ground floor windows on the front facade. The most evident decorative elements were a small pediment above the entrance door, flanked by narrow vertical windows; and a tall round headed window to the right of the main entrance emphasized by a small wrought iron rail. The northern

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facade of the house was dominated by a large porte cochère supported by square piers, above which was a second storey. A 1918 photograph reveals the addition of a prominent flat-roofed one-storey verandah on its southern facade. Supported by attenuated paired Tuscan columns, the porch was decorated by wooden trellis-work. This verandah, in combination with maturing plantings, emphasizes the unity of this simple house with its landscape. In 1923 Keefer designed a projecting two storey wing at the north-western corner of the house. The stable on the grounds was converted to a three-car garage and a second floor added above it. The house was virtually unaltered from 1923 until 1978 when the porte cochère was removed. In 1983 a new square, flat-roofed, and classically-inspired porch was added. It incorporates a cornice, pilasters and a rectangular transom and sidelights evocative of those which surrounded the original entrance, yet gives the house a more traditional appearance.

ENVIRONMENT

In 1913 Stornoway's site was a treed rural lot with no nearby settlement. The pastoral nature of the site has been only slightly altered over the years as lush plantings of trees and hedges have matured and changed. The large grounds have assisted the house in retaining its character despite the adjacent Acadia Drive having become a relatively busy road. Stornoway, as one of the earliest houses in Rockcliffe Park helped to establish the area as a desirable residential neighbourhood. Its continued existence as a single family home reinforces the present character of Rockcliffe Park.

July 11, 1986