

89-04

Selkirk, Manitoba
The Big House
Lower Fort Garry

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Big House was constructed in 1830-32 as a residence and administrative office for the Hudson's Bay Company. The construction was overseen by Pierre Leblanc. The structure had been extensively altered prior to period restoration in the 1960s. It is currently used for interpretive purposes. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 89-04.

Reasons for Designation

The Big House was designated Classified because of its historical associations, its environmental and local importance within Lower Fort Garry, and its architectural significance.

Lower Fort Garry was an administrative headquarters for fur trading and the focal point of the lower Red River settlement as well as an important link to Britain. The construction of the Big House reflects the consolidation of the fur trade under the Hudson Bay Company and the development of the fort as a trans-shipment depot and agricultural supply center.

The Big House is associated with George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson Bay Northern department's fur trade. He initiated the construction of the fort and the residence and office as a center from which to manage the fur trade. The house is also associated with the Northwest Mounted Police, whose initial headquarters were located at the fort.

The Big House is a very good example of a residence and administrative building designed in the British Classical tradition. The "L"-shaped structure was built in two visually distinct stages, each with a dominant hip roof and domestically scaled symmetrical facades. The annex was constructed using colombage pierroté as the structural system. Extensively altered over the years, restoration to the 1850-52 period involved replacement of much of the remaining original fabric of the building.

The Big House is part of the historic enclave defined by the perimeter walls of the fort within which all the buildings have a cohesive design and visual unity. The central location of the Big House has ensured its prominence over the years.

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Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Big House resides in the building's form, its overall proportions, construction materials, architectural details, interior layout and finishes, and its relationship to the site and setting.

The building is composed of two linked structures, both of which have prominent hipped roofs and masonry chimneys. The three sided verandah extension at the main house is a character-defining feature. The massing, overall roof profiles and building footprint should not be altered.

The Big House incorporates two of the three traditional building techniques used at the Fort: stone construction and colomage pierroté. The rubblestone walls of the main house are simply detailed with cut stone work at the openings. The colomage pierroté of the annex consists of a heavy oak timber frame infilled with rubblestone and mortar and finished in stucco. The south and east walls of the main house are original; the rest of the exterior walls have been rebuilt at various times. The simple, economical detailing of the wood verandah, windows, doors, and dormers is characteristic. The exterior is in good condition and merits an on-going program of repairs and maintenance.

The symmetrical balance and good proportional relationships of the windows and doors are typical of the British Classical style used for fur trade buildings. The large windows and doors contribute to the building's domestic character. The multi-paned wood sash windows, panelled doors and the shutters of the annex are compatible with the original design intent and should be retained.

The house was designed as a residence and administrative quarters; over the years the functional layout was modified to meet changing needs. The current layout of house reflects the 1850-52 period. Any changes should be based on physical or pictorial evidence.

The central location and scale of the Big House provide it with prominence within the fort environs. The house's manicured grounds with floral planting and a perimeter fence are in keeping with the historic character of the site and should be maintained.

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For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.