

87-112c

Québec, Quebec
Sewell House (Office Keeper's Quarters) Building1
87 St. Louis Street

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Sewell House, exemplifying early 19th-century development in Upper Town Québec, was built in 1803-04 by former Chief Justice Jonathan Sewell. Sewell himself was probably involved in the design. The original estate was encroached on over the years by the expanding military presence in the area, and the house itself variously used as a post office, officers' quarters, Government House, and a duplex for officers' families. The Department of National Defence is the present custodian, and the house is considered part of the Garrison Club complex. See FHBRO Building Report 87-112.

Reasons for Designation

The Sewell House has been designated Recognized because of its architectural presence, its associations with Chief Justice Jonathan Sewell and the development of Upper Town in the early 19th century.

Architecturally, the estate initially comprised a central building with two matching side pavilions, set in impressive grounds facing the esplanade, with the citadel behind them. The central building survives, and retains its basic form and detailing as a good example of British classicism. One of the hip-roofed side pavilions also survives, but has been incorporated into the east entrance of the adjacent Garrison Club.

Historically, the house is directly associated with its original owner, Jonathan Sewell (1766-1839). A lawyer by training, Mr. Sewell was appointed Solicitor General and Attorney General of Lower Canada before becoming a member of the Provincial Legislature in 1796. He married the daughter of William Smith, a former Chief Justice of Lower Canada, and in 1808 followed in his father-in-law's footsteps by becoming a Chief Justice and Chairman of the Executive Council. He is remembered chiefly for his alliance with, and influence on, the unpopular governor Sir James Craig.

The Sewell House also stands as an example of the administrative and monied class settlement of Upper Town, during the period of rapid population growth in Québec and the intense development of Upper Town under the British Regime.

Both the Sewell House and Chief Justice Jonathan Sewell have been recognized by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board as being of national significance.

.../2

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Sewell House is defined by its exterior, particularly the St. Louis Street façade.

The building is a two-and-a-half-storey, gable-roofed structure approximately 50 feet square. The front façade is a carefully proportioned, symmetrical, five-bay design, with central entrance originally marked by a semi-circular transom. The walls are of regular coursed dressed stone, with simple limestone window and door surrounds. The elevated first storey is demarcated by a slightly projecting string course. The basement has windows at each bay. The central basement window, more vertical than horizontal, is sheltered by the covered arch formed by the double flight of stairs leading to the front door landing. The window sash, originally double hung - nine over six - and later casement, are now single units of six panes. The present entrance door transom is of rectangular two-light design.

There is a boxed and trimmed cornice, and three wood dormers in the low-pitched gable roof. The dormers are symmetrically placed above the three central bays; their gable-roofed form may be a modification of an original hip-roofed design.

This façade, although modified, retains the carefully proportioned balance characteristic of the period, and should be carefully preserved. The masonry work, in particular, requires regular maintenance and periodic restoration by qualified conservators. Many of the wood elements have been modified over the years, but they should be preserved, and changed only if historical research provides a more appropriate and well-documented form and detailing.

The side and rear elevations have been modified more extensively. The right gable end has been stuccoed, the left gable end clapboarded, and in both cases the pattern of openings apparently changed. A two-storey addition with verandahs on the rear creates an ell-shaped plan. Again, these elements and finishes should be preserved unless there is sufficient and accurate documentation on which to base restoration of an earlier appearance. In any case, the basic form of the original house, which has survived basically intact, should be maintained. No further additions should be contemplated as these would obscure the simple geometry and careful proportions of the original.

The interior of the building has undergone several alterations and changes in use, often showing little sensitivity to the original character of the building. Although much

.../3

-3-

Québec, Quebec

Sewell House (Continued)

has been lost, future work should include architectural investigation and documentation of surviving historic fabric and any evidence of the building's evolution.

The present site does not provide a sense of the original setting of the house. However, all traces of earlier landscape treatment should be carefully documented and retained, and used as a basis for any development of the landscape treatment. It is important that the landscape reinforce the heritage character of the house.

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