

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE PAST:

Heritage MAKES PEOPLE happy

BY REID DICKIE | PART 1 OF A 2-PART SERIES

Heritage champions are feeling much less lonely these days. Around Manitoba, it is easy to find a growing appreciation of and hunger for authentic heritage experiences.

For example, *Doors Open Brandon*, a weekend event that satisfies curiosity about heritage buildings, public and private, by inviting visitors inside for a free look. **Heather Ewasiuk**, Brandon's Heritage Resources Officer, reports that the annual event draws almost 6,000 people, many of them tourists.

"People often call weeks in advance to confirm the dates and what locations are on the tour," says Ewasiuk. "We've noticed an increase in the number of repeat visitors and more out-of-town people taking the tour."

Since 2000, the heritage advisory committees in the rural municipalities of Langford, Lansdowne and Rosedale have cooperatively researched and created one-day bus tours of area heritage sites. Now offered for three days, the tour sells out immediately. Incredibly, the organizers have never repeated a site on any of their tours.

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HERITAGE UPKEEP

Maintenance is essential to the future of heritage buildings. A basic maintenance plan starts with familiarizing yourself with current standards and guidelines for heritage conservation. Identify the elements that define your property's heritage value. Historic Places Initiative at www.historicplaces.ca has detailed information on current standards and identification methods.

Now begin assessing your building. A thorough, physical inspection, done by someone with broad, detailed knowledge of past and present building methods, can help identify problems. Prioritize what needs immediate attention and what can be included in routine maintenance.

After stabilizing specific deterioration and making any emergency repairs, you can develop a cyclical maintenance plan. Do an annual assessment in the fall and make a list of conditions that require your attention. Follow through with the needed tasks each spring. If done regularly, a maintenance plan will prevent extensive and expensive repairs and increase comfort and value. Vigilance pays off.

To help with maintenance planning Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport is developing a maintenance manual. Designed to help heritage property owners and others interested in heritage understand the benefits and methods of properly maintaining heritage buildings, the manual will be available in 2008. ☛



Above: Villa Louise, an 1888 Italianate-style villa restored by the Stephen Hayter family, is a popular stop during *Doors Open Brandon*. The house was designated a provincial heritage site in 1991.

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Heritage makes people happy. We benefit from heritage conservation and maintenance on many levels. On a personal level, it honours our forbearers while reinforcing our own and future generations' sense of identity. Socially, heritage work creates pride in the physical achievement and renews community spirit. Culturally, heritage sites provide educational opportunities for schools and citizens. Economically, heritage attracts tourism while restoration and maintenance give local trades people and suppliers added business. Creatively, heritage buildings often serve as movie locations for Manitoba's booming film industry.

Another significant benefit is heritage conservation as recycling. Think beyond just cans and newspapers. Old building restoration is recycling on a large scale. Rather than discarding the place's history and materials, adaptive reuse helps the environment and the community. **Donovan Rypkema** of Place Economics estimated that when we tear down a small heritage building, we wipe out the environmental benefit of the last 1,344,000 aluminum cans that we've recycled.

Heritage building conservation is cost-effective. Costs per square foot are lower for restoration than for new construction. In their long-term planning, many heritage boards and owners are now considering geothermal for its efficiency and low cost.


Municipal heritage advisory committees have provided both method and impetus for councils to take advantage of local heritage sites and integrate them into their planning. Passionate committee members identify, develop and interpret local heritage according to their resources. For example, Selkirk's committee researched historically appropriate street names and gave council a list to use for new developments. In Hamiota, a sturdy old bank found new life as a busy arts centre. Gimli's 1915 public school went from the demolition list to being a vibrant town centre housing the amalgamated rural municipality and town offices, museum and art gallery. There are many other Manitoba heritage success stories.

Community Heritage Manitoba (CHM), a province-wide association of heritage advisory committees that was formed in 1997, advocates for members. CHM chairman **Cal Martin** says, "In this age, when technology and change are moving so fast, people need something to hold on to. Heritage offers that foundation."

A vibrant community embraces its heritage. "Towns that are doing well have a really strong heritage base to them," says Martin. "It's a pillar of their community."

They acknowledge and honour their past by preserving and promoting it.”

Many municipalities now include heritage in their short and long term planning. Gimli Heritage Corporation founding member and town councillor **Bill Barlow** states, “We are doing major strategic planning to keep Gimli’s success going and heritage is a big part of that.”

Essential in heritage planning is ongoing maintenance of restored sites, such as the Gimli Public School and Hamiota bank. “Gimli’s fire chief **Gary MacGregor** inspects the old school from top to bottom annually,” Barlow says. “He notes things that need a little bit of work but the restoration was so well done, there has been nothing major.” (See sidebar on page 15) 

In Part Two of this series, discover why and how municipalities around the province are passing bylaws, giving tax breaks and creating policies that protect heritage sites and promote local heritage issues and projects. Also, find out about the role of economic development officers in heritage conservation.

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Right: Gimli Public School, built in 1915, was saved from demolition by a group of concerned citizens. Today it serves the community again, housing municipal and provincial offices, a museum and an art gallery.

