

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Cave and Basin Hot Springs Bathing Pavilion

Banff townsite

Banff National Park, Alberta

The Cave and Basin Hot Springs Bathing Pavilion was built in 1912-14 to a design by Walter S. Painter and Francis S. Swales, architects. Major renovations were carried out in 1935 and again in the 1980s. By 1985, as part of the celebrations marking the national parks system's centennial, the Bathing Pavilion, swimming pool and Basin pool had been restored to their original 1914 configuration, a new bath house had been constructed based on the c. 1904 appearance of an earlier structure, and an interpretation function added. Parks Canada is the custodian. See— FHBRO Building Report No. 93-114.

Reasons for Designation

The Cave and Basin Hot Springs Bathing Pavilion was designated Classified because its site is considered the "birthplace" of Canada's national parks system, and because of the quality of its architectural design.

The discovery of the Cave and Basin Hot Springs and the decision to preserve them from private development provided the catalyst for the establishment of Canada's first national park and the eventual network of parks. The idea of establishing a system of national parks was seen, in part, as a way to generate revenue to offset the costs of extending the rail system through the mountain ranges of Alberta and British Columbia.

The Cave and Basin Hot Springs Bathing Pavilion is the oldest facility of its type within the Canadian parks system. The Bathing Pavilion represents the first major undertaking of the National Parks Branch following its establishment in 1911. The rustic design reflects concepts of the late Romantic Movement, that is, creation of a picturesque composition by artistically integrating a building of appropriate style in a complementary landscape.

The Bathing Pavilion consists of a symmetrical frontispiece articulated by two octagonal belvederes. Behind it is a large man-made swimming pool fed by natural hot springs. Along one side of the swimming pool is a multi-storied and terraced "long house" containing the change rooms and interpretive centre. Along the other side is a simple arcaded stone wall providing enclosure as well as vistas into the landscape. At either end of the long house are the naturalistic Cave and Basin pools.

The bath house, built in 1985, is based on the 1904 configuration of the first wooden bath house. It is not included in this designation, but merits preservation as a component of the design and layout of the 1914 complex.

Character Defining Features

The heritage character of the Cave and Basin Hot Springs Bathing Pavilion resides predominantly in its architectural design and in the integration of the building with the landscape. Built around the naturally-occurring but somewhat modified Cave and Basin pools, the Bathing Pavilion is picturesquely nestled along the hillside of the Bow River valley.

Major alterations to the Bathing Pavilion occurred in 1935 and again in the early to mid 1980s. The intent of the 1980s alterations was firstly to return the Bathing Pavilion and complex to its original 1914 appearance, and secondly to establish an interpretive centre commemorating the establishment of the national parks system at the system's "birthplace". The existing stone Bathing Pavilion building is predominantly historic fabric, while the overall planning configuration of the complex is a 1985 reconstruction of the original 1914 design. Notwithstanding, the Bathing Pavilion and complex remain essentially true to the original design. All components are intrinsic to the overall composition and should remain intact.

The design of the Bathing Pavilion is "rustic" in character, a popular motif for park architecture that combines vernacular morphologies and indigenous materials with the sentimentality of romanticism, particularly those sentiments evoked by landscapes considered picturesque or sublime. The rugged and massively-proportioned Bathing Pavilion reflects the craggy ruggedness of the mountain setting in a carefully arranged composition. The rustic motif and heavy massing are important design features and should be retained.

Rough-hewn and irregularly coursed stone masonry is the characteristic exterior finish, with accents of red Spanish tile cladding the octagonal roofs of the belvederes. The Rundle stone, a type of "blue" limestone, was quarried from the Bow River valley. The rough texture of the massive walls is contrasted by small regularly spaced cut-stone scuppers and corbels. Wrought iron lantern-type light fixtures provide a material contrast and enliven the arcaded stone wall. The use of colour and texture derived from natural materials is an important character-defining feature. Any new work should respect this precedent.

The existing tiles used for the swimming pool were installed during the 1980s renovation and are authentic to the original design. However, they have not performed well because of the corrosiveness of the hot spring water, and because of the freeze thaw cycle. Consideration may be given to utilizing a more durable material which is in keeping with the historic palette of construction materials. The stone masonry has been similarly affected, although not to the same extent. Regular maintenance of the stonework by skilled conservation masons is necessary to maintain this important feature.

The plan of the Bathing Pavilion and swimming pool complex is axial, although not

entirely symmetrical, with the main axis parallel to the hillside. The axial sequence begins with the symmetrical entrance frontispiece, focuses on the long rectangular swimming pool, and is terminated by the wooden bath house structure which is a representation of the 1904 configuration of the original bath house. The rounded back end of the swimming pool subtly shifts the main axis towards this bath house, which, although orthogonal in plan, is skewed off of the implied grid. Axial symmetry is established by the two octagonal belvederes and by the symmetrical stone arcades flanking the swimming pool. The axial composition is an important planning feature that should be respected.

Elements uphill of the main axis are less formal by design, with the loose, naturalistic edges of the Cave and Basin pools melding into the landscape. At three storeys, the terraced "long house", nestled into the hillside, is the largest structure and houses change rooms at the pool level and exhibit space on the upper levels. The transition from formal axial symmetry along the centre line to a looser, more organic type of planning along the periphery of the Bathing Pavilion complex is another plan feature to be respected.

The site and setting remain spectacular. The Bathing Pavilion is nestled in the Bow River valley at the base of Sulphur Mountain. Built around naturally-occurring hot spring pools - the grotto-like underground Cave and the protected out-of-doors Basin - the building design utilizes these site features to its advantage. The rooftop promenades and terraces offer elevated views of the natural surroundings and the recently implemented trails extend from the building out into the landscape, thereby enhancing the relationships between the building and environment. The integration of built and landscape features is a characteristic that must be maintained.

The landmark status of this site is best respected by carefully maintaining the heritage character of the building and all associated natural features. The reworked parking lot and front plaza do not adversely affect the overall composition of the Bathing Pavilion as a complex. To maintain the isolated and pristine qualities of the site, any further site development should be kept well outside the building's sightlines.

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

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