

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Ukrainian Pioneer Home was built in 1951 by the Canadian Parks Service to the designs of Peter Svarich and the Elk Island Museum Committee. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 92-71.

Reasons for Designation

The Ukrainian Pioneer Home was designated Classified because of its history as a commemorative structure for the 60th anniversary of the arrival of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada and its stature as the oldest purpose-built Ukrainian museum in Canada; and for its associations with important personages and events related to commemoration of Ukrainian immigration to Canada and with local and Prairie-wide development by Ukrainian immigrants.

While emulating the appearance of traditional Canadian Ukrainian pioneer farm houses, the building has been criticized for its substitution of some materials deemed necessary for dust and fire control, the exhibition of artifacts, the dictates of maintenance and the need to satisfy "modern" sensibilities. However, these features make the structure representative of the philosophical approach to early-to-mid century commemorative replica structures found in several National Parks across Canada.

The building's association with personages of both local and national significance lends prestige and symbolic importance. Two Prime Ministers - Louis St. Laurent and Lester Pearson - participated in events at the site. Numbered among the members of the Elk Island Museum Committee are several prominent individuals including Peter Svarich, who was an active member of the Canadian-Ukrainian community at the local and national levels.

As a landmark, the Ukrainian Pioneer Home attracted a sizeable percentage of the visitor traffic to the park in its heyday, and continued to receive notable visitation up until the years immediately prior to its closure. As a focus for numerous large-scale outdoor events sponsored by the Ukrainian Pioneer Association, and as the receptacle for donated heirlooms, the building is the subject of strong emotional attachment. Its location in a gladed landscape is in keeping with the spirit of other significant sites in the Astotin Lake Recreational Area of the park. With the removal of several of the park's recreational structures, this house, with its setting, has become a key remaining example for interpretation of the park's traditional landscape approach to facility placement.

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The heritage character of the Ukrainian Pioneer Home resides in features which reflect traditional Ukrainian building forms, including its one-storey rectangular log structure covered on both the exterior and interior by plaster; its steep, hipped roof covered by thatch; its exposed ceiling rafters extending down to wide eaves supported by console brackets; and its interior plan expressed on the exterior by vertical divisions in the plaster-covered log frame. Traits which also define the character of the building include a low protective embankment at the base of the exterior walls, and whitened plaster exterior walls with a coloured section at the base. The roof is covered with traditional long-stemmed rye (originally slough grass). All of these features are important to the integrity of the structure and should be maintained.

Features which differ from traditional Ukrainian building technology include metal reinforcing pegs instead of wood; wire lath to support modern cement plaster instead of plaster composed of clay, straw and dung; and the concrete pad foundation replacing stone footings, wood sills, and earth floor. These changes reflect the dichotomy between the attitudes and traditions of those who constructed the original houses and those who built this reproduction, and should be retained and interpreted as such.

The building faces a moderately sized, irregularly shaped lawn, framed by thick growths of aspen, poplar and spruce trees. The foliage almost entirely obscures the building from nearby roads, parking lots and other open areas. This quality should be preserved in future management of the site. A simple stone commemorative monument, erected in 1961 by the Ukrainian Pioneer Association of Alberta, sits to the east and complements the symbolic power of the site. Features which should be maintained in future site management include a walk leading to the west side of the house; a walk extending a few meters from the front door; a low ornamental well near the east wall; an interpretive sign to the west of the house; bedding plants, and domestic items placed adjacent the house.

1993.11.25