

85-13

Steveston, British Columbia
Former Gulf of Georgia Cannery

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The former Gulf of Georgia Cannery was built in 1894 as a salmon cannery. Since then it has served as a raw fish depot, herring cannery, and herring reduction plant. In 1979 the property was acquired by the Small Craft Harbours Branch, Fisheries and Oceans, as part of a larger site. In 1978 the cannery was designated a National Historic Site by the Minister of the Environment. It was transferred to the Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada in 1984. The Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 85-13.

Reasons for Designation

The former Gulf of Georgia Cannery building was designated Classified because of its strong historical associations, its architectural design and its importance to the Steveston waterfront. The building is directly associated with the fishing industry throughout the 1894 to 1970s period.

The cannery is a vivid and complex document of the development of the fish processing industry. The building consists of a main block (1894), an east wing (c.1897), a main block extension (1906) and various additions and outbuildings (1940 and later).

In design the building clearly expresses both the functional aspects of the various fish processing activities carried out there and the changing needs of the fish processing industry over much of this century. The historical integrity of the building is high. The survival of machinery from the later stages of the plant's operations increases its importance and legibility.

Situated in a prominent location on the Steveston waterfront at the end of Moncton Street, the cannery is a strong focal point in the Steveston community.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery resides in the form and fabric of the building, the historic equipment it contains and its compatible context.

The cannery is a large, wood-frame building situated on a wharf which projects over the Fraser River.

Its construction and evolution over a 50-60 year period through addition, extension and alteration (the main block, east wing, main block extension and various other additions

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and outbuildings), have resulted in a complex building of which its exterior form and massing, interior volumes and construction and variety of finishes are among its most prominent characteristics. The evolution of the building over time is clearly documented and strongly expressed in these characteristics.

The exterior form and massing of the building is comprised of a series of connected, various slope, gable-roofed blocks situated in a north-south or east-west orientation and shed-roofed additions to them. Each contributes to the complex massing and the evolutionary character of the building. Clerestories, wood and metal ventilators, cat-walks, chimneys of various designs and the variety of roof and wall finish materials (shingles, corrugated iron, cove siding and plain and corrugated asbestos-cement board) contribute to the varied composition of the exterior of the complex.

On the interior the evolutionary character of the building is expressed in the variety of spaces within it. These features are more strongly expressed in some areas of the building than in others and are particularly evident in areas where the various components of the building meet and in the visible variations in their construction, structure and finishes. Alterations should only be undertaken after careful analysis of these characteristics to ensure their protection. On the exterior the colour scheme and on the interior the consistent use of wood frame construction provide the main unifying elements of the design.

The complex has a high degree of visual and physical integrity. The first priority of any property management activity must be to retain and protect the building's documentary characteristics as evident in its complexity and layering.

The construction of the cannery, both materials and structure, contribute to its functional, utilitarian character. The wharf on which the building rests is constructed in round timber posts and heavy timber beams and lateral bracing. The building is also constructed entirely in timber - light framing for roof, wall and floor framing, heavy timber for posts, beams and mezzanine supports. All elements are sawn sections. Lateral stability is provided by diagonal bracing at post tops. Although steel is used for bolts, fasteners, tension rods and spreader-plates, structural steel sections form no part of the building's structure. Although well and carefully built, the structure is vernacular rather than highly engineered in its conception.

The interior fabric contains a rich patina in the form of script, temporary fasteners, dirt, oil and fish-scale deposits and patterns or wear. These testify to its prior use and warrant careful protection.

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In its basic design the building is characterized by the arrangement of self-contained and interconnected spaces. Some spaces accommodated specific functions while others are not specific. The activities carried out in some areas changed over time depending on the requirements of different industrial processes and the volume of production in a specific year. To meet some requirements (boiler room, office), enclosed space is created by insertion of rooms within the larger volumes of the building. Several spaces contain physical evidence of prior use in their configuration (for example the canning line), furnishings (locker rooms), and equipment (ice house and herring reduction plant). These features are important documentary references to prior use and should be respected and incorporated in any development proposals.

As a utilitarian, industrial building the cannery is internally oriented - access is achieved from a limited number of points from both the land and water sides and fenestration is very limited. The introduction of multiple entry points and extensive glazing would seriously alter the character of the building and should be resisted.

If alterations, structural reinforcement, and additions are necessary the design of these should be based on a single, consistently applied design approach and material vocabulary which are compatible with the character of the building and draw on its precedents. Strongly contemporary or "high-tech" solutions would be inappropriate here. If adaptation of the building to changing or new uses becomes necessary, every effort should be made to take advantage of existing volumes, spaces, plan features and circulation routes to accomplish objectives.

The site is an irregularly shaped property which conforms to the configuration of the plant and several outbuildings. The physical relationship of the building to navigable water is central to its historic function and should not be weakened, particularly by the addition of circulation routes. Less obvious, but of considerable importance, is the relationship of the cannery to the land. As an industrial property the features and materials of the site are functional and utilitarian. Any development of the site should be undertaken with restraint and its qualities respected to ensure its connection with its industrial past is not weakened. All attempts to "prettify" the approach to the property in response to the increasingly tourist oriented main street of Steveston should be resisted.

Revised
1996.01.25

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