

THE CONTRACTOR'S DESK[®]

Volume 15, No. 5

Mailed under Canada Post Publication
Agreement No. 40050030

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A Message
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Heritage Buildings Reborn Through Adaptive Reuse

By Andrea O'Brien

Imagine sipping a gourmet café au lait in a fisherman's stage. Or dining on spicy Chinese nutty noodles where light keepers once kept their watch. Or listening to nationally acclaimed writers in an old Orange Lodge. Thanks to some creative businesses and organizations such experiences are possible when travelling around the island of Newfoundland. Their progressive ideas have spawned these unique projects while also giving new life to heritage buildings.

Newfoundland and Labrador's architectural heritage is a valuable part of its culture. Heritage buildings are one of the most tangible aspects of the province's rich heritage — serving as important historical records on its landscape and contributing to the province's sense of identity and place.

Many of the province's heritage buildings have suffered from under utilization and lack of preservation. But a new attitude towards heritage preservation is gaining a foothold as communities and businesses are realizing its cultural and economic advantages. Heritage buildings are being given a second life through adaptive reuse, a process that adapts buildings for new uses while retaining heritage features.

Change Islands, on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, is known for the traditional fishing stages that dot its coastline. With changes to the inshore fishery, many of these buildings had fallen into disrepair. With the help of Change Islands' Stages and Stores Heritage Foundation and the financial support of the Fisheries Heritage Preservation program (an initiative of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador) many fisheries buildings have been saved. The Burgundy Squid Café and Craft Shoppe, located in the old Torraville family fishing stage, now hosts coffee drinkers and craft connoisseurs.

Customers like the café and its setting. "The café and gift shop reflect the historical and cultural aspects of the community, provides a central docking facility and creates additional employment for local residents who provide the arts and crafts," says owner Herb Bown.



Cape Broyle R.J. O'Brien's Store

While nets, buoys and salt fish have been replaced with art work, crafts and coffee, the Torraville stage will continue to be a landmark on Change Islands thanks to its new use.

Jill Curran, one of the operators of Lighthouse Picnics in Ferryland, on the Southern Shore of the Avalon Peninsula, also recognizes the value of heritage buildings as places to set up shop. "The lighthouse has a real sense of place and history about it — it's a hard-to-describe feeling that you often do not get in new buildings. These buildings have a story to tell — they are part of what is uniquely Newfoundland," Curran explains. "Local people are so happy to see the building restored and have been wonderful about giving us photos

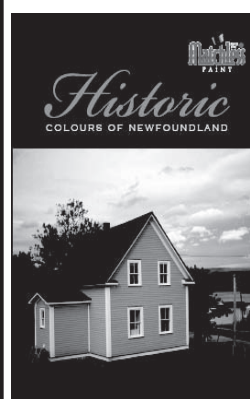
and items from the lighthouse," notes Curran. Although she admits that the remote location poses some challenges. "The location means you are at the will of the weather no matter what — there



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English Harbour All Saints Church

is no shelter from the wind, which sometimes means we lose the odd dish cloth.”

A few kilometres north in Cape Broyle, Wilderness Newfoundland Adventures is located in R. J. O’Brien’s old general store. Co-owner Stan Cook Jr. admits there were some drawbacks in choosing a heritage building for their headquarters. “There has been much time and money invested in modifying the building without greatly changing the style,” he explains. But the advantages outweigh the drawbacks. “We wanted to provide the best interpretive adventures that we could. The building helps us provide a tangible piece of Newfoundland culture, a unique structure that was unlike anything else our competitors would have,” says Cook.

The restoration of heritage buildings ensures that the story of these places can be preserved. In 1999, Charlie Payne brought and restored the old Orange Lodge in Woody Point, on the island’s west coast. Since he was thirteen years old, Charlie played music for dances, weddings and good times in the lodge, which had always been a community space. The building’s new use, as the Woody Point Heritage Theatre, is compatible with its old role. Each summer it hosts the Writers at Woody Point Festival, an event which has gained international attention. Writers and entertainers from Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada and around the world

gather here in a celebration of creativity. The benefits reach beyond the doors of the Orange Lodge. “The festival has sold out each year. When the theatre is full, the restaurants, the B&Bs, the motels are also full. Everyone benefits,” explains Payne.

Adaptive reuse has also fused new life into some deconsecrated rural churches in the province. In an attempt to save a church in English Harbour, Trinity Bay, the English Harbour Arts Association (EHAA) was formed. “All

Saints Anglican Church is the only major building remaining in English Harbour. Its loss would be devastating,” says Association member Kim Paddon. EHAA plans to operate an arts centre from the church and start an artist in residence program in the community — while fostering community pride. Paddon observes that, “It is difficult to measure the value of having a sense of pride in where you live. People who feel positive about their community are more likely to support and contribute to its growth and development.”

Adaptive reuse has many benefits. Restoration projects create jobs for craftspeople who utilize local skills and materials. Businesses and organizations that use the renovated spaces create employment. And the buildings are attractions in communities that benefit from increased visitor traffic. Adaptive reuse means that buildings that were once integral parts of a community are given a second chance to shine, and that the spirit and stories of these places will live on.

Andrea O’Brien is a Church Inventory Officer for the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador. For more information visit www.heritagefoundations.ca, email hpi@heritagefoundations.ca or call (709) 739-6592 Ext 4.

~Advertisement~



Ferryland Lighthouse courtesy of Heritage Foundation