CENTRE FOR NFLD. STUDIES
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

PRESENT
PAST FUTURE

The trident

FEBRUARY 1974 No. 6

In each issue of THE TRIDENT this column will focus attention on some of the less obvious structures of historic significance in and around St. John's.

These buildings are listed in the Canadian inventory of Historic Buildings and have been chosen on the basis of a combination of criteria including age, historic significance and archetectural merit. Many of these buildings are in danger of demolition in the face of development. The Trust will attempt to arouse interest in their preservation and to present alternatives for their use as an integral part of the community.

The Fisherman's Hall

Known locally, in recent years as the McNamara Bldg. because of its long association with the firm of Frank McNamara Ltd., well known St. John's Commission agents, this two story building, of square cut local stone with its slate covered saddle roof, already had a long and interesting history before it was purchased by Frank McNamara on Dec. 29th, 1903.

Built originally as a Fisherman's Hall and an exhibition centre for fisheries and agricultural produce, the foundation stone was laid on May 23rd 1861 on a site formerly known as "Lady's Ship Room," at the corner of Queen Street and George Street. It was officially opened on Oct. 28th of the same year, just fifteen years after the fire of 1846 which started on the same street.

In its first colourful decade the hall played host to a visiting trapeze artist, named Trenear, D.C. LaRue's War Show, A Grand Bazaar, in aid of St. Patrick's Church, Riverhead, a variety concert by the Power Family and the founding meeting of the Star of the Sea Society.

On September 20th, 1867 a theatre company, Wilson and Clarke, opened their second season in the Hall with a play entitled, "How to rule a wife."

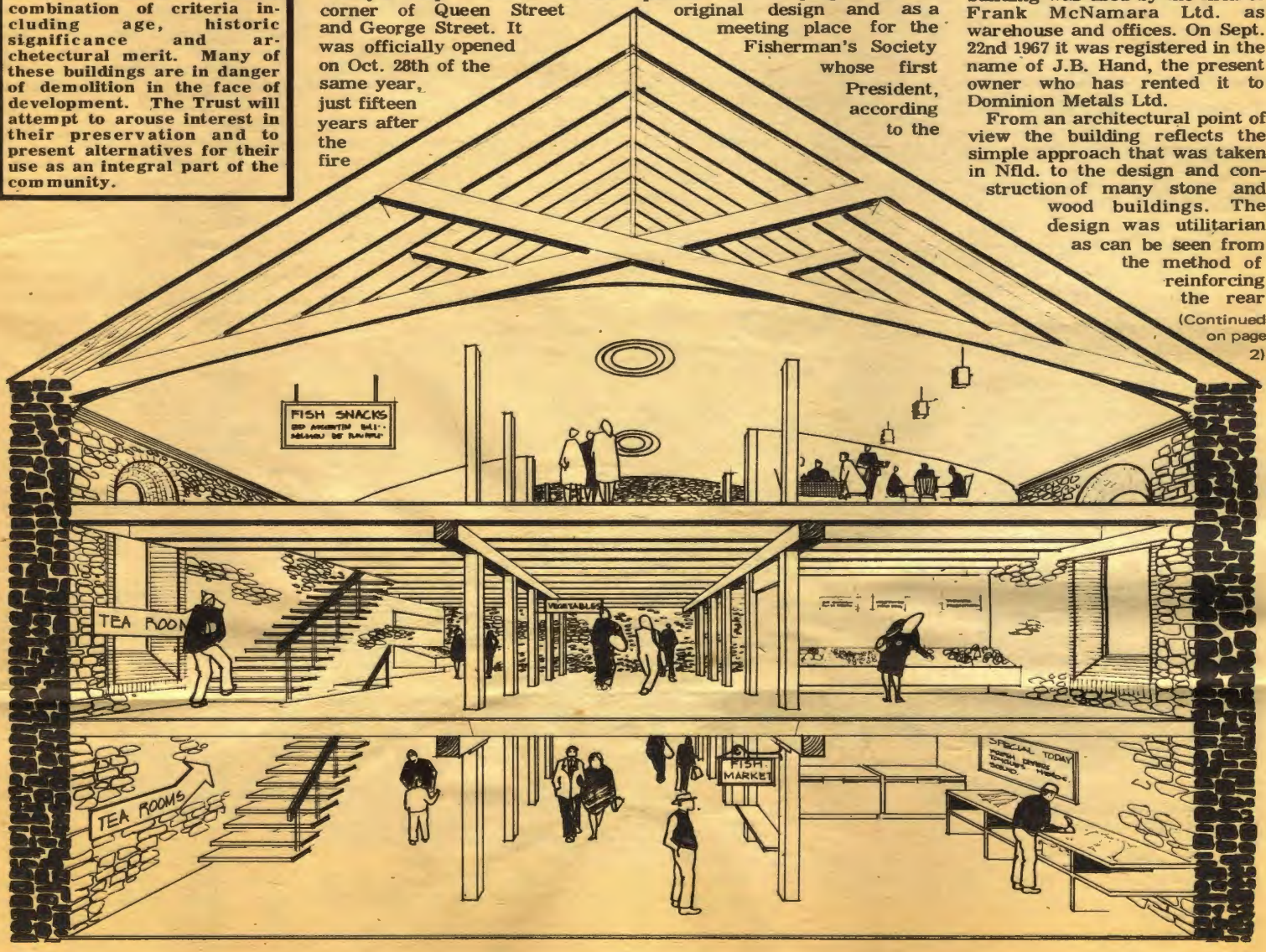
The Hall also of course, served for exhibitions of fish and produce in keeping with its original design and as a meeting place for the Fisherman's Society whose first President, according to the records was Captain Charles Power who died on April 24th, 1867.

On Dec. 16th, 1872, the building was transferred to Bishop Power and was dedicated as St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church on Dec. 21st, 1873. For the next ten years the upstairs portion of the building served as a chapel for the people of the West End pending the completion of St. Patrick's Church, and the ground floor served as a school run by the Sisters of Mercy. The school was continued until close to the end of the century.

From 1903 until 1967 the building was used by the firm of Frank McNamara Ltd. as warehouse and offices. On Sept. 22nd 1967 it was registered in the name of J.B. Hand, the present owner who has rented it to Dominion Metals Ltd.

From an architectural point of view the building reflects the simple approach that was taken in Nfld. to the design and construction of many stone and wood buildings. The design was utilitarian as can be seen from the method of reinforcing the rear

(Continued on page 2)



Fisherman's Hall

(Continued from page 1)

corners with brick thus avoiding the more delicate cutting and fitting of stone. This is also very evident in the construction of the window and door openings where again, brick is used to form the arch rather than stone, which aestheically would have been more suitable. These short cut are not really surprising in the light of the fact that total construction time was five months.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the building is the interior wood structure. The interior consists of two very strong lines of splendid pine columns measuring one foot square and chamferred at forty five degrees. A very simple capital at the head of the column carries pine beams eight inches square. Both columns and beams are said to have been cut and sawn locally.

Another interesting aspect of the building is the roof structure. The desire to achieve a curved plastered ceiling lead to the errection of a large number of intersecting beams forming a truss system which not only added support to the roof joist but also supplied the lateral bracing that is essential in such stone buildings.

In addition to contemporary photos of this building, which do little justice to its potential, we have presented an architect's concept of how this building could be converted for use as the much talked about fish and produce market, a use which has historic precedent.

The building, which contains approx. 9000 square feet of usable floor space is in very good structural condition and could also lend itself to conversion as a small theatre and theatre bar, a museum of St. John's, a craft workshop and co-op retail outlet, and countless other uses which would enhance the area of our New City Hall and greatly increase the tourist potential of the downtown.

—Shannie Duff

Architectural detail and drawings by Beaton Sheppard Photo Richard Stoker).

Towards a closer association of Heritage groups

In the past decade there has been an increased public interest in the value of heritage, combined with a vastly increased threat to our historic resources due to pressures of development.

Partly in response to these circumstances, a number of autonomous heritage groups have been formed in the province in the past ten years, largely concerned with local heritage problems. The exceptions are the Nfld. Historical Society, which boasts of a much larger history and attempts to involve itself with the history of the province at large, and the Nfld. Historic Trust, whose intent has been to be a province wide organization, but which in fact is very largely centered, in membership and in involvement with the St. John's area.

Although the Historical Society can claim an established identity and a province wide focus of interest, I think it would be fair to say that its concern is largely with the recorded history and less with artifacts, sites and buildings. As these are the very areas which are in urgent need of protection from the pressures of development I feel that we can say there is no existing provincial organization which is serving the function of an all encompasing, truly province-wide organization in the Heritage field.

Public interest in Heritage is increasing and it is in the long run the value placed on Heritage concerns by the public at large which will be the deciding factor in determining how much of our past will remain for the future. However, time is very much against us and it seems to be an established pattern that when Heritage and a Bulldozer meet head on, Heritage gets run over.

This is compounded in Nfld. because it would appear that Historic Resources is not one of Government's pressing plans. This is reflected in the scarcity of professional resource people in the field.

The efforts of voluntary organizations, therefore take on greater significance than they might under different circumstances.

Prehaps the time has come to look at the possibility of a closer association between the existing heritage groups in the province. Certainly all could benefit from increasing contact and communication. There are problems of course in developing the form that such association might take, but should we not at least take a first step in that direction, keeping in mind that the deciding factor should be the most effective use of the existing volunteer efforts for the preservation of the Historic Resources of the Province of Nfld., and the encouragement of public and government interest in this area.

If you have an opinion about the advisability or indeed the feasibility of a closer association of volunteer heritage groups in the province, please write and let us know.

SHANNIE DUFF

THE TRIDENT is published quarterly by the Newfoundland Historic Trust. Editor: Shannie Duff; Photographic Editor: Richard Stoker; Advisors: Beaton Sheppard, Bruce Neal. THE TRIDENT attempts to reflect the activities of those individuals and groups concerned with the preservation of our historic heritage. It welcomes articles and photos of such activities, particularly those implemented at the community level.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN APPOINTED BY THE NEW EXECUTIVE

Research and Planning	Bob Barakat
Programmes	Bev Miller
Membership	Susan Ayre
Archivist and Librarian	Lettie Halpert
Finance	John Perlin
Exhibition	Gerald Walsh
Publications	Shannie Duff.

Heritage Canada

Heritage Canada is an independent, non profit corporation, incorporated under part II of the Canada Corporations Act. Set up by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, the Hon. Jean Cretian, it was initially funded by a $12,000,000 Federal Grant, the corporation was intended to "protect buildings of architectural and historical value for workable contemporary use, and as well, to keep natural areas and scenic landscapes unspoiled for future generations."

The corporation is still in the formative stage as far as policy is concerned and it is unclear as yet, how it will link up with and assist local Heritage groups.

In Sept. of last year, as a first step in communication between Heritage Canada and the local groups Heritage Canada announced a proposal to grant one year's free membership to all members of any Voluntary association actively involved in the preservation of Heritage.

The Trust executive have decided to accept the membership and all Trust members are therefore as of Oct. 1973, members of Heritage Canada. You will receive newsletters, fact sheets and other information direct from Heritage Canada, and will also have access to library and information services.

New lease on life for old neighborhoods

(Photo by Richard Stoker)

The Nfld. Historic Trust received a subsidiary from the Canadian Council on Social Development to send a delegate to The Canadian Conference on Housing Rehabilitation, held in Montreal from Nov. 11th to 13th, 1973.

The Conference brought together an almost unbelievable variety of delegates from all parts of the country and a star studded cast of Federal and Provincial Ministers, Aldermen, top ranking civil servants, Authors, Architects, Agitators and Innovators all linked by a common interest in the rehabilitation of older neighbourhoods as a vital part of the solution to the housing crisis for low and moderate income families.

Sessions were provided on such topics as rehabilitation technology, planning, code enforcement and non-profit rehabilitation. Presentations were given by groups who have been successfully involved in neighbourhood rehabilitation projects and non-profit housing and one of the most valuable aspects of the conference was the opportunity for an informal exchange of problems and ideas with representatives of these groups.

The main emphasis was on conserving and improving existing housing and the rehabilitation of existing neighbourhoods and the application of the new National Housing Programmes, in particular the Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (N.I.P.) and the Residential Rehabilitation Programme (R.A.P.) to these problems.

An interest in the preservation and upgrading of existing neighbourhoods represents a radically different approach, on the part of the Federal Government from the earlier "tear down and rebuild", Urban Renewal programmes.

It would appear to be a far sounder approach from a human point of view to retain the traditions and social fabric of existing neighbourhoods. There are in addition the more pragmatic aspects of cost and the necessity of retaining in the inventory of existing housing the older housing stock, in order to make any dent in the acute shortage of decent accommodation for low and moderate income families.

Depending of course on the condition of the housing in question it is as a general rule far cheaper to bring an existing house up to standard than to rebuild.

And what has all this to do with Heritage preservation? It goes without saying that the application of N.I.P. and R.A.P. funds to the downtown of St. John's would receive an enthusiastic endorsement from the Nfld. Historic Trust. Our policy has always been restoration for use. Apart from a handful of structures, which are of major architectural or historic merit older buildings should demonstrate their viability by their ongoing use in the community.

The "Downtown" of St. John's would seem to be ideally suited for an application of the new Federal Housing Programmes. Primarily residential, low and moderate income with 80 per cent of the housing stock suitable for rehabilitation, within walking distance of all the amenities and part of a city where the housing problem has reached crisis proportions. In addition there are historic considerations which include the tremendous potential of the downtown as a tourist attraction.

The availability of federal funds for neighbourhood improvement is contingent on the signing of a N.I.P. agreement with the province concerned. It can be assumed that such an agreement with the province of Nfld. is well along as the Minister of Urban Affairs, the Hon. Basford, announced a few days ago that "agreement in principle" had been reached with all provinces except Quebec.

As soon as such an agreement is signed, we would urge the Municipal Government to do everything in its power to see that the downtown area of St. John's is designated a N.I.P. area so that the available funds for the rehabilitation of existing neighbourhoods can be used to stem the tide of deterioration and neglect and restore this area to what our former mayor once described as the best place to live in all St. John's.

BUYING AND RESTORING A HOUSE IN OLD ST. JOHN'S

Beginning Feb. 12th, 1974 the Trust under the auspices of the Extension Dept. of Memorial University, will co-ordinate a seven week course designed for people interested in buying and restoring a house in old St. John's.

The course will deal with areas such as architectural styles, financing, choosing a neighbourhood, adaptation and redesign, wiring, heating and plumbing, a presentation of houses available by a number of local realtors and an informal discussion with a group of people who have restored homes of moderate size and price in old St. John's.

There will be seven two hour sessions on successive Tuesday nights. The fee is $12.00 which will be turned over to the Trust.

For further details please contact the Extension Service at Memorial University.

Newfoundland Historial Society lecture schedule

The Newfoundland Historical Society will be holding monthly lectures between January and May, 1974, and members of the Trust will be most welcome to attend. Watch the newspapers for announcements of dates and places of meeting.

January 29. Keith Matthews. The Reformers of 1932.

February. To be announced

March. James Hiller. The Constitutional Crisis of 1908-09-a sub-plot.

April. L.G. Harris Confederation, 1869-1949.

May. David Hufford An aspect of Newfoundland folklore.

Reference file on Heritage to be established

Over the past number of years members of the Trust have become increasingly involved in the preparation of briefs, position papers, newspaper articles and other related activities which could, I suppose, all be lumped under the heading of Education or Public Relations for Heritage Preservation. It has become increasingly obvious that a reference file of available material material in this area is essential if we are to fully develop this very important function of the Trust.

Mrs. Lettie Halpert has agreed to co-ordinate a Heritage Reference File and to collect and organize the archives of the Trust. The following is a brief outline of the aims and objective of the committee. (Ed.)

To provide members of the Trust with information which may be helpful in our attempts to aid in the identification, protection and preservation of buildings and sites of historic value, efforts are now being made to bring together the following:

(1) Bibliographies of relevant books and periodicals available in the MUN Library and the Hunter Public Library.

(2) Indications of useful materials held by the Provincial Archives, the Nfld. Historical Societies, and other agencies whose interests coincide or overlap with ours.

(3) A file of pamphlets and selected books published by other Heritage or Historic Trust groups.

(4) Selected periodicals in the field of historic preservation.

(5) Photo-copies of articles of special interest to the Nfld. situation, from reference or periodical sources.

(6) A few books whose general usefulness warrants purchase

Members are invited to suggest materials they know or have used, dealing with aspects of preservation of historic houses and districts, architectural control in city planning, residential rehabilitation, the role of the private citizen and pressure group in influencing public opinion and legislation in the area of historic resources, etc.

All archival papers will be housed for the time being at the home of Mrs. Shannie Duff.

Letty Halpert

NEW EXECUTIVE ELECTED AT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD IN THE LECTURE ROOM OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE CENTRE OCT. 3rd., '73
L to R John Perlin Immediate Past President, Beaton Sheppard Honorary Secretary, Shane O'Dea President, Janet Gardiner Treasurer, Shannie Duff, 1st Vice Pres. Keith Mercer 2nd. Vice President. Missing from the photo are Pat Rahal, Secretary, and Penny Rowe 3rd Vice President.

Two Honorary Life Memberships were awarded at the Annual Meeting "In recognition of dedicated service in the preservation of the Historic Resources of the Province of Newfoundland." The awards were presented by John Perlin (left), outgoing president of the Trust, to Mr. Martin Bowe (right) Director of Historic Resources, and Mr. Shane O'Dea (centre), who has been acting as supervisor for Nfld. of the National Inventory of Historic Buildings. (Photos by Richard Stoker)

EXHIBITION

1974

The Nfld. Historic Trust Exhibition this year will feature a nostalgic look at .."The Pre-confederation Years" 1945-1949.

Still in the planning stage it is hoped that the exhibition will bring back the feeling of those hectic, exciting and controversial years which climaxed with Nfld. Confederation with Canada.

(Photo by Toni Guy).

Powerscourt: a progress report

This report is, in a way, almost a memoir of my interest in preservation as Powerscourt was one of the first houses I became particularly concerned about. When George Story was compiling his inventory in 1969, I drew it to his attention. He in turn drew it to the attention of the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board. They were sufficiently interested to ask Charles Cullum and Martin Bowe to do architectural and historic reports on the building. Unfortunately, because the building was not officially Military (such being the bias of Northern Affairs at that time), it could not be designated as a National Historic Site.

Nothing further was done until 1972, when St. Joseph's Parish acquired the building, intending to demolish it and use the site for a playground. However, two members of the Parish Council, (Bernard MacDonald and Austin Cooper) recognizing Powercourt's value, contacted me to see what could be done to save it. George Story, Dr. G.A. Frecker and I set up a committee to negotiate with the R.C. Episcopal Corporation, and eventually the government. The corporation were extremely co-operative and generous and with their consent we approached the government who were unable to do anything because of budgetary restrictions and suggested that we reapproach them next year.

Heritage Canada was approached at the same time but were unwilling to fund anything at that early stage in their development. (This reason has not, apparently, prevented them from funding projects in another province.)

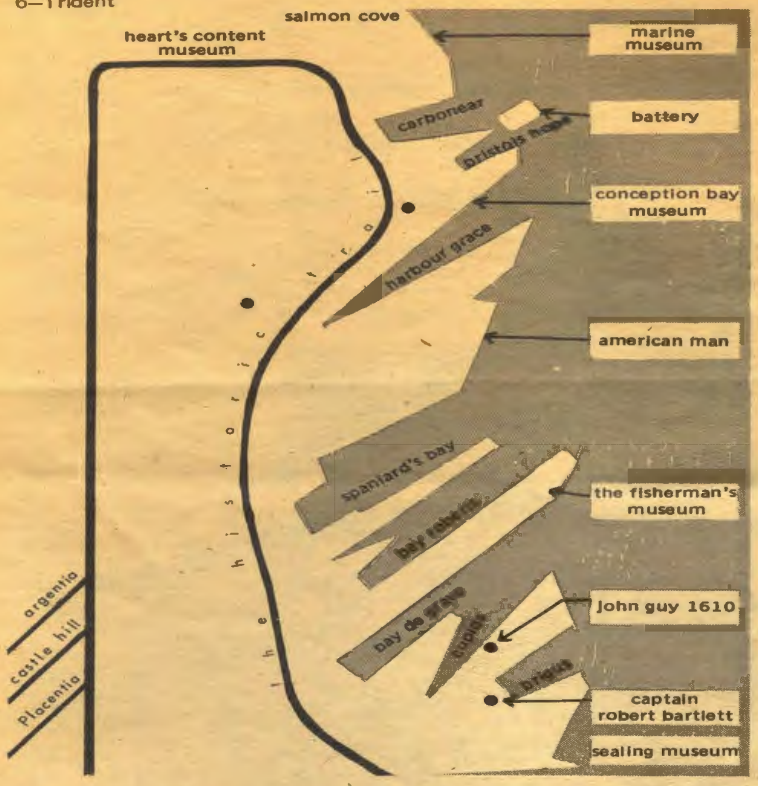
The next agency approached was CMHC. who, during the City Conference, expressed an interest in funding the rehabilitation of older homes. Beaton Sheppard and I then drew up a proposal and a set of plans to convert the house into two units of low income housing with a CMHC. loan.

The intention here was to show preservation could aid in the alleviation of a social problem. But, after CMHC. had examined the house, they told us it would cost too much to rehabilitate to their standards.

So Powerscourt still stands but in constant danger of fire and the effects of deterioration. The Provincial Government, through the Minister of Tourism, The Hon. Tom Doyle, are being asked to include the acquisition of Powerscourt, in their estimate for this year and it is possible that they will see fit to do this and acquire the building.

Ideally, of course, the building should once again become a private dwelling. It could be made into one large unit, (kitchen, dining room, study, bathroom and three bedrooms) and one smaller unit (kitchen, dining room, sitting room, bathroom and two bedrooms for about $30,000.

—Shane O'Dea



The Historic Trail

Tours of Conception Bay sites

A project under consideration by the Conception Bay Museum Committee and the Placentia Area Historical Society is the production of a small booklet called the "Historic Trail" which will indicate points of interest in each of the communities along the trail.

The idea of an Historic Trail was developed to encourage an awareness of Newfoundland history and provide a means whereby local people and visitors can be encouraged to experience this history.

Already, the development of key features such as the National Exhibition Centre at Harbour Grace, Castle Hill National Historic Park at Placentia, the Cable Office Museum at Heart's Content, the Fishermen's Museum at Hibb's Cove and a number of Federal and Provincial Historic site markers provide the basic skeleton of the trail. It is hoped that over the next few years additional local developments can be encouraged.

Programme meetings

Up to now, the bulk of the work of the Trust has been done by an "executive committee", which is a euphemism for a handful of overworked people. Many of our members have complained that there is no way they can get actively involved and find out what is going on. We are alsc aware that there is an urgent need to make the general public more aware of the value of heritage preservation and of the main issues and problems involved.

A partial answer, we hope will be this new series of programme meetings, four a year (as funds permit). The format will vary and will include guest speakers, slides and movies, mini exhibitions, panels and debates, or a combination of any of them, in short, any format that is topical, interesting, informative and will allow the general public to become familiar with Heritage.

Review - by Alice Story

Heritage Preservation is an issue today because it is part of a revolution of consciousness about the relationship of man to his environment.

In the past decade there has been a growing fear about where our current policies of development are leading. There is an increasing reaction against the waste that has become a part of our way of life and a backlash against the constancy of change.

This column by Alice Story, former lecturer in English at Memorial University, will be a regular feature of THE TRIDENT. Mrs. Story will review some of the books which have and which are changing our attitudes about our relationship to the environment we create; about our past and how it relates to the present and what it can mean for the future.

Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Modern Library), $3.75.

Many people have expressed their puzzlement as to what the Newfoundland Historic Trust is actually about. One fundamental answer can be found in a book not itself concerned specifically with historic preservation, Jane Jacobs' classic study of modern cities and their organic structure. Her concepts represented a decided break with conventional methods of city planning and have now, a decade later, finally penetrated the thinking of city planners and even government agencies as a source of stimulating and provocative views, and above all, of solutions to critical urban problems.

Historic preservation is not a luxury, but a necessity in the creation of rich and diverse communities. If a city area has only new buildings, only enterprises which can support the high cost of new construction can exist. Typically, supermarkets, banks and loan companies use new buildings. Bookstores, antique shops and craft shops frequently use old buildings. "Old ideas can sometimes use new building. New ideas must use old buildings," writes Mrs. Jacobs in a characteristic paradox. Thus new construction alone cannot support diversity, and diversity is necessary for a vigorous community. The economic value of older buildings, and not solely as historic sites, is firmly established.

The doctrine of salvation by new bricks and concrete has conventionally been preached as a solution to slum clearance. Yet when old residential and business areas are demolished, giving rise to ghettos of new low-cost housing, people wonder why conditions often become worse than before. Monotony is the answer. A successful city district will have some old buildings replaced by new, but at the same time others will be rehabilitated for use.

Use, in fact, is the prime requisite of an exciting and invigorating city. Discussing the uses of sidewalks, roads, parks, and neighborhoods, Mrs. Jacobs comes as close to a definition of the city as its illusive and complex nature will allow. By analysing a wide variety of lively communities, the reasons for dead ones emerge. Cities and their districts thrive on diversity, not duplication: diversity of uses, and of structures. The interesting city has small blocks offering a maximum of mobility in different directions, has buildings of all ages and architectural design put to a variety of uses, and is peopled by the workers in the district as well as its inhabitants and visitors at different times of the day.

Cities are made by their people, not their planners, and if the individual could become more aware of the organic nature of his community the planner would have the material to work with creatively. Otherwise it is like the plumber attempting to cure a kidney ailment. I can think of no more entertaining and instructive way of becoming aware of contemporary urban issues and their ramifications for St. John's and other historic Newfoundland communities than by reading Jane Jacobs.

Announcing our first programme meeting

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Maud Rosinski of the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia.

Mrs. Rosinski will give a fifty minute slide presentation prepared by the Heritage Trust and the Landmarks Commission of the City of Halifax entitled, "HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN HALIFAX URBAN DESIGN.Part 1. The Downtown."

The presentation attempts to answer the questions, Why preserve? What to Preserve? and How to Preserve?

Mrs. Rosinski who has been very much at the center of the Heritage scene in Nova Scotia, uses two projectors and an overhead projector to illustrate a fast moving and thought provoking discussion of Heritage and development.

It is one of the best we have seen and very relevant to the future of St. John's.

TIME: 8 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6th., 1974

Place: Foran Auditorium, City Hall.

The South-west Beach at Eastport. At the extreme right foreground is the spot where Joseph Squire, the first settler built his first home —(Photo courtesy Harold Squire).

Reflections on a passing heritage

Recording the history of our outport communities

The bare facts of vital statistics and events of provincial or national importance are for the most part recorded and safe from the ravages of time. What we are in danger of losing, especially in our smaller outport communities, is a word picture of day to day life which will put flesh on the bones of fact and pass on to succeeding generation some idea of how these communities began and a word picture which will evoke a feeling of outport life in an earlier age.

Television has all but destroyed the traditional art of story telling by which the events of one generation were passed on to the next, and resettlement and abandonment are gradually obliterating many of the hundreds of the communities around the coast of the province.

It is, therefore, an event worthy of note, when a resident of one of our smaller communities, whose life spans back to touch the life of the first resident, writes a book recording the history of his community, Eastport, Bonavista Bay, entitled "A Newfoundland Outport in the Making".

Mr. Harold Squire has written such a book about Eastport—His grandfather, Joseph Squire was the first resident of the community which was then known as Salvage Bay. Harold Squire was 20 years old when his grandfather died and he remembers him well.

As a young man, in the days before T.V. Harold Squire spent many a Sunday at the home of his Uncle, Mr. Enos Squire, listening to stories about the early days of Eastport. Fifteen years ago, he started going back to hear the old stories again, this time with a note book, because he realized that with his Uncle's generation would pass the stories which would make the early history of Eastport a living experience for future generations.

From these notes, his own experience and a winter of research in the Nfld. Archives and the Records of the Anglican Church in Nfld. Harold Squire has perserved for future generations a feeling of what it was like to be part of the early days of Salvage Bay.

We hope that every Nfld. community will find its own historian.

Silver Jubilee celebrations

Dr. Robert Baracat, chairman of the Research Committee of the Trust, was asked by the Executive to develop a number of activities which would involve the Trust in the Celebrations commemorating the silver Jubilee of Confederation. With the help of Beverly Miller he has come up with a number of suggestions which we feel are both suitable and feasible. Although these plans are still in the formative stage, we present them here in outline form.

1. The development of walking tours in the downtown area of St. John's. The downtown area has been selected because it is within easy access of most of the major hotels and would allow tourists to develop a feeling for the importance of the harbour in the historic development of St. John's. These tours, once developed would be made available to the general public, either through the local newspapers or in the form of a small pamphlet.

2. The plaquing of ten buildings of significance in St. John's, preferably from those on the tour, with an emphasis on the downtown area.

3. A photo contest in the local newspapers which would involve the identification of a detail of one of the buildings on the tour each week for a number of successive weeks. Full details of the building from which the detail is taken would be presented the following week.

4. An essay contest for school children.

Tours of historic St. John's

Since the possibility of the Trust's developing a volunteer guide service for Historic Tours in the St. John's area, was first raised in an earlier issue of THE TRIDENT, a number of organizations with convention plans have approached us and expressed an interest in using this service.

A detailed itinerary is being prepared so that all the necessary information re routing and historical detail will be available to our guides in printed form.

This service is only available by pre-arrangement with organizations who will provide their own busses. With enough volunteers each guide would need to do only two or three tours a season, each about 1½ to 2 hours long.

This is a first class opportunity to make a case for preserving the historic character of North America's oldest city and at the same time to provide some revenue for the Trust.

If you are interested in participating in our volunteer guide programme or would like some information about the service please call Janet Gardiner—726-5712.

Personally Speaking

by Shane O'Dea

The establishment of an independent historic sites and buildings board

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS BOARD — an essential step in the development of a coherent preservation policy for Newfoundland.

The time is long past when Newfoundland can afford to be without effective historic preservation legislation. The original act ("The Historic Sites, Objects and Records, Act, 1959") called for the establishment of a board to designate important sites but the government neglected to establish that board except on an ad hoc basis. The current act ("The Historic Sites, Objects and Records Act, 1973") disposes of the board entirely and leaves all power in the hands of the Minister of Tourism. This is not an improvement; it merely confirms the previous situation and makes all preservation decisions political decisions. Such a situation only serves to bring the cause of preservation into disrepute by making historic sites the objects of political squabbles or of maladministration of funds. The further consequence of this is that government begins to see all historic sites as politically dangerous and adopts a policy of neglect.

Thus it is essential, if we are to have a worthwhile program of preservation, that the power of designating a historic site, area or building be turned over to an independent board composed of people who can bring to the process of designation a degree of objectivity that is not possible for a politician. This would remove from the Minister the unpleasant task of having to choose between various interest groups and remove preservation from its dependancy on political interest. Additionally the board should only concern itself with historic sites and buildings and not with objects or records, these demanding a different type of expertise for their designation.

The need for such a board is apparent if we consider some of the significant buildings that have been destroyed in the last thirty years:

TRINITY - The Garland House - home of the first Speaker of the Assembly

PLACENTIA - Blenheim House - neo-classical residence of the Sweetmans

FERRYLAND - The Carter House - home of one of Newfoundland's oldest families

TWILLINGATE - Ashbourne's Store - erected 1743, Newfoundland's oldest surviving structure

HARBOUR GRACE - Munn's Premises - headquarters of one of the greatest nineteenth century trades

ST. JOHN'S - numerous buildings including Fort Amherst, St. Mary's Church and City Hall.

And this list is only a list of the major casualities - buildings whose merit had long been recognized. There were undoubtedly others of note which passed without record.

The loss of so many is cause, not for surrender, but for determination to preserve the significant examples of those that remain. To this end it is necessary to determine what are the significant examples. We are fortunate in that much of this work has been done already - initiated by George Story and completed by the teams of the Canadian inventory of Historic Building such a survey of St. John's has been carried out. The Canadian Inventory has also covered a major portion of the province so that what remains is to select from these lists of old buildings those that are of notable historic or cultural importance by virtue of age, architecture or association.

This task would be one of the duties of a Historic Sites and Buildings Board and, if preservation is to move from its present status as an emergency or crisis operation to one with some coherent status, then all those interested in the saving of the physical elements of Newfoundland's history and culture must insist on the establishment of this Board whose composition, duties and powers could be as follows:

—The Board of Trustees of Historic Sites and Buildings should be composed of no more than six persons as well as the Minister or his designate and the Director of Historic Resources.

—The six lay members of the Board should be drawn from a broad group of people who have demonstrated a knowledge and interest in the preservation of historic sites and buildings.

—Members of the Board should be unpaid but reimbursed for any expenses incurred while acting in their capacity as members of the Board.

The duties of the Board should be as follows:

—To compile a graded list of historic sites and buildings determining and assigning the degree of priority to be accorded each and recommending specific action.

—To investigate methods of restoration, stabilization and/or preservation relevant to the particular designated site or buildings.

—To investigate sources and means of funding such work.

—To determine the most efficient and economic use of buildings and sites designated.

—To encourage private individuals and private enterprise in the acquisition and preservation of significant structures.

The powers of the Board should be as follows:

—To issue a list of those buildings and sites determined to be of historic and cultural importance.

—To require that owners of designated sites and buildings obtain the permission of the Board before interferring, in, any way with the site or building.

—To procure by gift, donation, devise, bequest or loan buildings and sites of historic or cultural significance for the benefit of the Province.

—To lease or develop any sites or buildings that might come under the control of the Board in a manner that does not interfere with the historical significance of those sites or buildings.

—To advise on the development of further legislation as necessary.

The value of the creation of such a Board is that it removes from the government the task of having to decide, on the basis of political pressure, what is or is not a historic site. The Board, while a creation of the government, is essentially outside the government so that its decisions while assisting do not necessarily implicate the government. The job the Board is asked to do would appear to be vast but there is little doubt that there are people in the province who would be willing to do it. It is essential, of course, that they be sufficiently knowledgable to be able to do it.

Unless such a Board is established with these powers historic preservation in Newfoundland must remain a haphazard undertaking until the day comes that what remains to preserve is not worth the effort of preservation.

The opinions expressed in the "Personally Speaking" column are not necessarily those of The Nfld. Historic Trust.

Membership

Do you have friends who are:
—interested in the history of their community?
—concerned about the way our heritage is being lost?
—anxious to do something about it?
Then they should be members of the Nfld. Historic Trust.

Tell them to contact our membership chairman...
Susan Ayre 722-2244

Membership Fees are:
Family $5.00
Single $3.00
Group $10.00

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ROBINSON-BLACKMORE