

RURAL VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE  
AS A CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCE  
IN MANITOBA:

A METHODOLOGY OF TECHNIQUES  
FOR MANAGEMENT OF A RURAL RESOURCE

Thesis submitted to the Faculty  
of Graduate Studies, University of  
Manitoba as a partial requirement  
for a Master of Arts degree  
in the Department of Geography

Edward M. Ledohowski  
April 1988

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BY

EDWARD M. LEDOHOWSKI

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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"The Decline of the Interlake Hamlet" in Newsletter of the Prairie Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Vol.2, No.1, December, 1978, pp.28-36.

"French-1830", "Ukrainian-1897", "Jewish-1903", "German-1910", and "Slavic Culture", articles in Interlake Flyer, July 1974 edition, published by the Fund For Rural Economic Development (F.R.E.D.) Administration, Norquary Building, 401 York Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1974.

ABSTRACT

The field of heritage resource management has grown significantly in Manitoba during the past two decades, as it has across North America, particularly in the area of architectural preservation and development. This field continues to expand as government agencies and private organizations increasingly recognize the potential for profit and public appeal through the protection and rehabilitation of heritage structures for commercial and touristic purposes as well as for educational and cultural purposes. Currently, most Canadian urban centres are aggressively promoting heritage architecture development through the preservation and revitalization of vintage commercial and residential districts and main streets, and by the statutory designation and protection of individual architectural landmarks.

Despite this general growth in the level of development activity, rural architecture resources, and most notably vintage farm structures, continue to be comparatively ignored by developers as valuable cultural and economic resources. In Manitoba, this situation persists despite the acknowledged richness and variety of its early ethnic, or vernacular, farmstead building types.

Experience abroad, especially in Europe, indicates that vintage farm structures can be adapted to a wide variety of development types, most notably in terms of heritage tourist attractions and hospitality facilities. While a small number of heritage tourism developments have been attempted in Manitoba, the industry is in an embryonic stage, and given the rapid rate of loss of these structures through natural deterioration and planned demolition, it is unlikely that a significant

variety or number of characteristic vernacular farmsteads will be developed as either cultural or economic enterprises before they are effectively lost as developable sites.

This thesis proposes that by coordinating all existing and future heritage development initiatives according to an ethnic- and natural-mosaic thematic basis, and by connecting all such developments via a hierarchical matrix of motorized "heritage trails", a unified, highly visible tourist package can be created which could greatly enhance both the level of local heritage development initiatives and the province's overall attractiveness as a tourist destination area.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

During the past two decades heritage resource management in Canada has grown from a relatively low priority governmental responsibility to one of this country's fastest growing and most valuable resource disciplines --as it has in many other countries. The principal component of this new field, by far, has been heritage architecture.

In Canada, this sudden growth in the attention being given to heritage architecture, is largely attributed to the growth of Canadian nationalism commencing with the national Centennial in 1967, and through a growing realization that these irreplaceable vestiges of our national identity are rapidly decreasing in number. Included among this growing segment of the population are many private and government agencies who have recognized the potential for profit and public appeal through the protection and development of heritage structures for commercial and touristic purposes as well as for educational and cultural purposes.

A number of major development types have now become commonplace. Since the mid-1970s, a large number of Canadian communities have established heritage architecture conservation programs where entire, well preserved, older urban districts have been rejuvenated through architectural restoration and rehabilitation projects. Toronto's Yorkville District, Halifax's Waterfront District, Winnipeg's Exchange District and Vancouver's Gastown development are just a few of the better known such developments involving the recycling of outdated but aesthetically attractive urban structures.

The growing appeal among tourists, of restored and preserved historic structures, has resulted in an increasing number of open-air

museums or so-called "heritage parks", such as Calgary's well known pioneer village development and a number of other federally and provincially developed sites such as Lower Fort Garry in Manitoba, Fortress Louisburg in Nova Scotia, Upper Canada Village in Ontario and King's Landing in New Brunswick. Heritage accommodation in the form of Bed & Breakfast and Farm Vacation facilities is now becoming a form of tourist growth industry, especially in eastern Canada. Tourism is now recognized as the world's fastest growth industry, and heritage attractions and heritage hospitality facilities are steadily accounting for a greater percentage of the tourist dollar. As far back as 1971 Canadian Travel Survey found that over 30% of tourist spending was motivated by a desire to visit historical and cultural areas. This percentage has increased steadily.<sup>1</sup>

The growing popularity of heritage architecture development goes well beyond purely educational and commercial motives, as indicated by the booming home renovation industry. In Canada, in 1975 it represented 32% of all residential construction, in 1982 it had risen to 40% and by early 1987 it had surpassed the value of new home construction.<sup>2</sup> The popularity of such television shows as "This Old House", and the number of home renovation magazines such as "Country Living" attests to the popularity of older homes in today's real estate industry. Clearly, during the last twenty years heritage architecture has demonstrated an extremely valuable and popular type of resource potential.

Despite this recent growth of heritage architecture conservation and development, rural architectural resources have experienced much less attention, from research and documentation to planning and

development. Many noted authorities have recognized this gap. James Marston Fitch noted that, "Until very recently, most national preservation programs have been predominately upper-class and urbane in their emphasis, thus most artifacts studied and preserved have been monumental- the seats of the powerful and famous- as has the written record of history."<sup>3</sup> The principal landmark buildings of the countryside -farm buildings- have been particularly neglected, in both North America and in Europe, despite their often unique architectural and historical qualities. Samuel Stokes acknowledged "If American farm structures continue to diminish or disappear, we will have lost another irreplaceable reminder of our heritage, or more. For nowhere is architecture tied more organically to the land than in the pursuit of agriculture."<sup>4</sup>

In Manitoba, this situation is quite disconcerting, given the unique ethnic variety of this province's early agricultural building types. Research recently conducted by the Historic Resources Branch of the Manitoba government, has indicated that as much as three-quarters of pre-1945 surveyed agricultural structures in surveyed areas lie effectively unused, unmaintained and often abandoned. Of the historically and often architecturally more valuable pre-1914 structures, for those which still survive, the figure approaches almost ninety percent in some municipalities.<sup>5</sup> In light of these figures it does not seem likely that many of these early farm structures will survive the next decade, without some type of intervention.

This generally poor rural preservation situation in Manitoba may soon become even more desperate. Should proposed changes to the Municipal Assessment Act entail the removal of the tax-free status for

farm structures, there would be a real financial disincentive for farmers to retain redundant early buildings and thus a real threat would be created for mass demolition of this province's surviving early agricultural building stock -especially in light of the current farm financial crisis. Even a modest \$25 annual levy on an old barn would likely be considered an unacceptable financial burden if that structure were not being actively used. Considering the rich ethnic or vernacular nature of this province's early agricultural building types, the potential loss in terms of tourist and cultural resources would be immense. This province's rural heritage architecture is in grave danger and there is a very real sense of urgency for its conservation and development in Manitoba. Marc Denhez underscored the seriousness of Canada's rural heritage architecture situation when he noted that "if conservationists and authorities choose to wait until fancy economic schemes become available for designated heritage, they may be left with little heritage to protect."<sup>6</sup>

The preservation of farm buildings, however, is an extremely complex problem; one only recently addressed in North America, or even in Europe, despite the latter's well developed preservation programs. Government authorities and conservationists alike have little clear strategy as to how to deal with this particular problem.

Traditionally, the protection of heritage structures has been largely viewed as a cultural responsibility of government and Heritage Societies. In Canada the federal government has long recognized the importance of preserving selected architectural sites because of their historical significance and cultural value, as has the Manitoba provincial government. To date, the structures selected for protection

in Manitoba have been restricted to sites of recognized national and provincial significance which invariably tend to be large architect-designed structures located within or near large communities. While this mind-set is changing, most agriculture-related sites continue, in practice, to be regarded as being only of local significance, despite their architectural and ethnic variety and the important historic role many of them represent in terms of the development of the province and the country.

Recent new heritage legislation in Manitoba (1986) includes provision for Municipal designation of Heritage structures, thus providing local governments with the legal mechanism for the protection of rural sites. However, possessing the authority to act is one thing. The willingness and knowledge of how to use this authority effectively is often another matter, as has been shown in Saskatchewan.

Rural municipalities in Saskatchewan have had the authority to designate and protect local architectural landmarks since 1980. Their experience points out several problems with the municipal designation approach to architectural conservation. First and foremost, agricultural buildings were almost completely overlooked as sites meriting municipal protection. The latest available information (September 1987) indicates that of 400 sites designated, or in the process of designation, only twelve, or three percent, involve agricultural buildings. Community structures such as town-halls, railway stations, court houses, schools and churches were considered as more important structures for protection by the local authorities.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, it was found that the vast majority of the municipally designated structures were preserved as "display-pieces" or museums

which generate very little income for their own maintenance. Since municipalities must provide financial support, the possibilities of adding other, agricultural sites to the list is severely hampered.

Finally, the popularity of the local railway-station or school cum "village museum" approach to rural architectural preservation in Saskatchewan has resulted in a proliferation of almost identical eclectic displays of pioneer artifacts with low tourist appeal and minimal educational value.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the municipal designation and local museum approach has several serious shortcomings and is not of itself a viable solution to the problems facing rural heritage planners.

In light of the similarity of rural architectural resources and social-economic climate in Manitoba, the problem of conserving heritage farm buildings must, as it also should have been in Saskatchewan, be approached in a broader context.

In contrast to the rural situation, many of the architectural preservation programs in Canada's urban centres are characterized by private development of sites for commercial and residential use. These programs, such as Winnipeg's Exchange District and Halifax's Historic Waterfront project, have been highly successful, partly because of the strong emphasis placed on utilization of structures. Very few preserved urban structures are "show-pieces". A concentrated effort is made on the part of the planners to effectively use the buildings, and a wide range of usage types are generally incorporated. Rural architectural resources, however, especially farm structures, differ greatly in size, construction, design, function, and location. As a result they are often very difficult to adapt to new uses. This alone is a major reason why many rural architectural preservation programs

have not experienced the same success and why rural preservationists have had to rely heavily upon legal protection measures, despite the acknowledged deficiencies of this approach.

Further complicating the situation, farm structures are invariably thinly scattered throughout the countryside, hampering access and the provision of services. A comparatively small population and economic base also inhibits the creation and funding of preservation groups and programs, and legal protection measures are often resisted as an infringement upon private property rights. Thus many of the approaches used in urban conservation and development projects cannot be directly transferred to the rural situation. Indeed, as James Biddle, former president of the U.S. National Trust for Historic preservation, once stated "the prospect for saving rural historic architecture indeed seems bleak"<sup>9</sup>

Despite these obstacles, however, there are many isolated examples of successful preservation and development projects involving agricultural structures in Europe, the United States, and Canada. Generally, these combine ambitious legal protection measures with the commercial development of sites, high profile publicity, and public education programs. But these projects are the exception, not the rule. Many other projects have been less successful and, despite a growing awareness of the urgency of rural architectural conservation and the growing public interest in heritage architecture, the systematic protection and development of these potentially valuable resources continues to be a major resource management problem.

This thesis argues that, through a careful analysis of successful, heritage management projects, the inherent difficulties of rural

preservation, and the nature of the province's rural resources and social-economic climate, a comprehensive plan of action can be created to derive maximum use of this vanishing resource. Using this simple comparative process, this thesis will formulate a realistic development program for Manitoba's rural architectural resources in general and for its historic ethnic farmsites in particular.

Chapter Two will review the recent growth of heritage architectural preservation and development, the benefits which have been realized from development, and the difficulties encountered in rural programs, and will also investigate selected current approaches to rural architectural preservation in both North America and Europe. The nature of the province's rural architectural resources and current level of development activities will be reviewed and assessed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents a development model for a broad-based province-wide scheme for pursuit of regional development. The concluding chapter will outline recommendations for implementing the strategy as a province-wide regional development approach to rural architectural conservation.

An often heard critique of writings on heritage preservation is that they lack practicality. Indeed many do. This thesis will avoid this pitfall. Its focus is on specific resource problems and for the provision of workable solutions which will enhance the future of the province and its residents.

## 2.0 HERITAGE ARCHITECTURE AS A RESOURCE CONCERN - A PERSPECTIVE

### 2.1 Growth of the Architectural Preservation Movement.

It has long been recognized that certain old buildings possess a particular value beyond that of their purely functional use. As historical landmarks, selected architectural monuments in western Europe have inspired patriotism, evoked imagination, and have been protected and developed for these specific purposes since the days of the Roman Empire.

Planned protection and development of heritage architecture did not, however, become a serious resource concern in Europe until the Industrial Revolution swept the continent in the late 1700s. With rapid industrialization changing the face of both town and country, it became increasingly apparent to many scholars and historians that centuries of history, traditional lifestyles and buildings were being destroyed at an ever increasing rate. A small but growing movement was spawned to protect the best of what remained of Europe's architectural and historical treasures.<sup>10</sup> By the mid-1800s many European countries were legislating the protection of various categories of national monuments, including structures such as castles, cathedrals, manor houses, civic buildings and other such structures which may have played an important historical or cultural role. These national monuments invariably tended to be seats of the powerful and wealthy.

Despite this long-held recognition that selected heritage structures were important cultural symbols meriting protection or rehabilitation, it has only been in the past fifty years that the economic potential of heritage architecture has begun to be realized.

This has largely been the result of the growing appeal among the general public for heritage attractions and environments, facilitated by the development of rapid modes of public transportation and communication. Europe's castles and cathedrals have always had a certain tourist appeal, but lately, even the more domestic heritage sites, such as well-preserved old towns and villages and small country inns and hotels, have become increasingly popular. Similarly, there is a growing appeal in residing and working in heritage environments as an alternative to the largely impersonal settings provided by modern architecture. With this growing attention to heritage structures, many governments, resource planners, developers, heritage associations, and private individuals, now realize that "heritage pays". Architectural preservation, which began as a low scale, largely patriotic field of endeavor, has now become one of the fastest growing resource management fields in the western world.<sup>11</sup>

Historically, the heritage architecture preservation movement developed in two rather different branches; Preservation and Conservation. As Michael Middleton noted, "the former generally involves faithful restoration and implies the role of a museum, whereas the latter involves renovation and implies adapted and functional new uses. One becomes a monument to the past; the other continues to live."<sup>12</sup> The modus operandi of Preservation is the development of the cultural and educational potential of recognized architectural landmarks. The potential economic benefits through tourism are largely a spinoff or secondary benefit. The primary objective of Conservation, on the other hand, is to develop economic potential; culture and education is often somewhat compromised. Another basic difference

between the two approaches is that Preservation invariably involves a small number of often expensive developments, whereas Conservation generally involves a large number of comparatively inexpensive interventions.

### 2.1.1 ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

The protection and Preservation of selected heritage structures has traditionally been the focus of Government and of well-organized heritage associations. Until quite recently it generally involved urban and/or upper-class types of architecture.

#### a) Preservation by Governments

The world's first recorded architectural preservation statutes were passed in ancient Rome, where in the fourth century A.D., various emperors issued decrees to protect monuments commemorating the glories of the Empire.<sup>13</sup> This recognition of the value of architectural preservation died with the Empire, and throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, mere survival undoubtedly occupied the minds and hearts of most governments and rulers.

The protection of architectural monuments for their cultural usefulness was revived by King Gustavus of Sweden who pioneered the identification and protection of prehistoric antiquities during the 1600s, and went on to preserve a large number of that country's ancient religious structures.<sup>14</sup>

A century later a number of German principalities were protecting various categories of monuments. In 1837 the French founded the "Commission Nationale de Monuments Historiques", and thus established