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# Bethune Memorial House

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2020



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BETHUNE MEMORIAL HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2020.

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#### Note to readers

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual implementation update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about  
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## Foreword



As the steward of Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas, Parks Canada is committed to protecting and restoring the ecological and commemorative integrity of protected heritage areas from coast to coast to coast.

We invite and welcome all Canadians to these sites to discover nature and connect with our country's history.

We are proud to collaborate with Indigenous partners, local and regional residents and stakeholders, visitors past and present, and with interested people and parties from across the country. Together, we strengthen the connection that Canadians have with their natural and cultural heritage.

We are committed to work with, learn from, and share leadership with Indigenous peoples and elders who have walked the land since time immemorial and who have made possible the creation of so many protected places.

As the key accountability documents for the management of heritage places, management plans are developed through extensive consultation. These plans articulate long-term visions, set strategic management directions and establish objectives for Parks Canada places.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this management plan for their contributions and their commitment to the future of this national treasure. I am pleased to approve the Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan.

Ron Hallman  
*President & Chief Executive Officer*  
*Parks Canada Agency*



## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*

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*Senior Vice-President, Operations*  
*Parks Canada*

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## Executive Summary

Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site (NHS) is situated in Gravenhurst, Ontario on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, approximately 160 kilometers north of Toronto. Built in 1880, it initially served as a manse for the Knox Presbyterian Church and later, Gravenhurst United Church. Bethune Memorial House marks the birth and early years of a heroic and colourful Canadian, Dr. Norman Bethune. Bethune, a gifted surgeon, saved countless lives in Canada and overseas, bringing his medical innovations to the battlefield and advocating universal health care. Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site was designated a national historic site in 1996. As the birthplace of a true Canadian hero, the site also holds immense spiritual and personal meaning to visitors of Chinese descent, from Canada and abroad, decades after the events that created Bethune's legacy.

Visitor experiences are launched at the Visitor Centre with discovery of the story of Dr. Bethune, a medical pioneer and humanitarian, through his personal diaries, engaging multimedia presentations, artwork and the medical instruments he designed. After a few steps outside, visitors can enjoy a tour of Bethune Memorial House, a Victorian home, in a property that includes commemorative statues, grounds with gardens and an interactive, replica First World War display.

Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site is open to the public from May until November. Visitation to the site has grown year-on-year, between 2013 and 2016 to reach 17,895. The site has widely fluctuating visitation patterns during the season, with approximately half of the site's visitation occurring during the fall months. By actively managing patterns of use, visitors will have increased opportunity to be captivated by interactive, compelling, and provocative programs. The spring, in particular, presents the opportunity to offer particularly engaging, premium programs, in contrast to the busier atmosphere of the fall rush. During summer months, increased marketing to local tourists and seasonal residents could capitalize upon an under-realized market.

This management plan replaces the 2001 Management Plan for Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site. Since the last management plan, the new Visitor Centre was opened, and enhanced programming has been developed, presenting a wider range of stories, exhibits and experiences. Improvements to accessibility have also been made.

Engagement and consultation with partners and stakeholders, as well as the general public in the preparation of this management plan, yielded key thematic areas for guiding management activities at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site for the next ten years. Over sixty individuals and groups from across Canada as well as from Spain and China responded to the online survey or provided feedback during public open houses. Many of their ideas were incorporated into this document.

The two key strategies for the ten-year management plan are:

- **Facilitating a personal connection to the Bethune legacy through visitor experience:** This strategy aims at actively managing the capacity of the site and the diverse needs and expectations of visitors, so that Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site continues to offer relevant, outstanding and tailored experiences.
- **Partnering strategically to benefit visitors and Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site:** This strategy aims to build and develop partnerships that:
  - Maintain and improve the quality and diversity of the visitor experience offer at Bethune Memorial House.
  - Provide opportunities to build appreciation, support and understanding of key messages beyond the boundaries of the site.
  - Capitalize on the credibility accrued by the Bethune legacy to introduce Parks Canada to a broader audience, in particular, of Chinese descent.





## Table of Contents

Foreword .....	iii
Recommendations.....	v
Executive Summary.....	vii
1.0 Introduction .....	1
2.0 Significance of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site ....	4
3.0 Planning Context .....	4
4.0 Vision .....	5
5.0 Key Strategies .....	6
6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment.....	9
<b>Maps</b>	
Map 1: Regional Setting - Gravenhurst .....	2
Map 2: Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site.....	3



## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and national historic site administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by the Agency. The *Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the President & Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

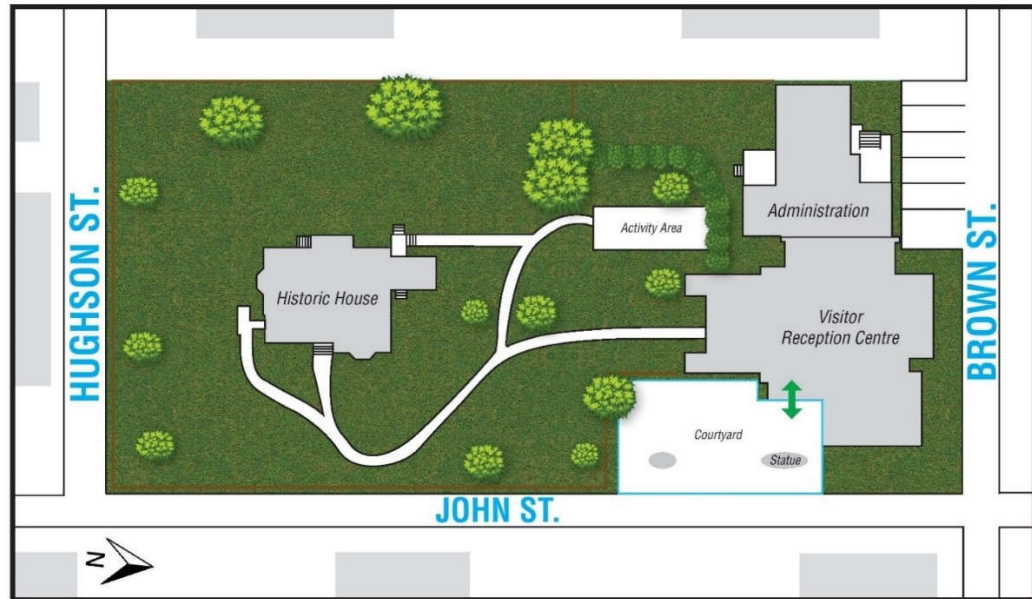
Canadians, including Indigenous peoples, were involved in the preparation of this management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site in years to come.

Map 1: Regional Setting - Gravenhurst



Map 2: Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site



## 2.0 Significance of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site

Bethune Memorial House was designated a national historic site in 1996:

- as a memorial, it embodies and interprets the national historic significance of Dr. Norman Bethune;
- as a memorial, it embodies and interprets Dr. Bethune's ancestral roots, his formative years as a minister's son in small-town Ontario, love of the outdoors and restless mobility; and
- as his birthplace, a site valued and revered in the People's Republic of China (China), it captures the symbolic significance of Dr. Bethune to the Chinese community.

Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site marks the birth and early years of a great Canadian, Dr. Norman Bethune, who changed countless lives in Canada and overseas. His values reflect the Canadian ideals of a society with a social conscience, and these demonstrate the potential in every person to make a better world. As the birthplace of "*a true Canadian hero*", the site also holds immense spiritual and personal meaning to visitors of Chinese descent, from Canada and abroad, decades after the events that created Bethune's legacy. The site is an authentic, living memorial to Dr. Bethune.

Dr. Bethune served in all three branches of the military – Army, Navy, and Air Force – during the First World War. A renowned thoracic surgeon, he developed vital medical procedures including the development of mobile blood transfusion equipment and techniques. A dedicated physician, his global commitment started taking shape during his time in Spain. He was also responsible for strengthening the bond between Canada and China, fostering Canada's reputation as a nation with a social conscience and advocating for Canada's universal health care system. The site is preserved as an educational experience for visitors as well as a place of reverence in Chinese culture.

The cultural resources that tell the story of Dr. Bethune are protected, most notably the historic house, so that visitors can experience the birthplace and environment that nurtured his early years. Personal effects such as Bethune's artwork and diaries help connect visitors to his life experiences.

## 3.0 Planning Context

Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site is located in Gravenhurst, Ontario, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, approximately 160 kilometers north of Toronto. Built in 1880, Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site initially served as a manse for the Knox Presbyterian Church on Muskoka Road North. The site is in a mixed-use, low-rise residential neighbourhood with tree-lined streets.

Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site is open to the public from May until November. The site is a busy place where interactive, compelling, and provocative programs captivate a diverse range of audiences, delivered by passionate and knowledgeable Parks Canada staff. Visitors can tour the Visitor Centre and discover the story of Dr. Bethune, a medical pioneer and humanitarian, through his personal diaries, engaging multimedia presentations, artwork and the medical instruments he designed. Displays are presented in English, French and Chinese. Visitors can also enjoy a tour of Bethune Memorial House, a Victorian home, in a property that includes commemorative statues, grounds with gardens and an interactive, replica First World War display.

The initial stages of engagement with local Indigenous communities and the Moon River Métis have begun at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site.

According to a Visitor Information Program survey conducted in 2013, 94% enjoyed their visit. Visitation has increased steadily from 11,807 in 2013 to 17,895 in 2016, with 50% of visitation occurring during the month of October when the Muskoka fall colours draw an influx of urban and new Canadians to the region. A 2018 State of Site Assessment identified two topics to be considered during the management plan review:

1. **High visitation relative to site capacity:** Visitation to Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site has grown 14% year-on-year, which equals a 52% increase between 2013 and 2016. Visitation already meets or exceeds capacity during peak visitation periods, resulting in extended queuing to enter the site, especially during the fall peak visitation period.
2. **A partnering strategy:** Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site receives a wide range of requests from both international and regional stakeholders. A dissonance exists between how these stakeholders view the site—as a diplomatic and nation-to-nation link between Canada and China—and the limits of the site’s scope and capacity as the place of Bethune’s birth. Many of these requests fall beyond the mandate of Parks Canada.

This management plan replaces the 2001 Management Plan for Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site (NHS). Since the last management plan, a new \$2.5 million Visitor Centre was opened in 2012. Enhanced program offers have been developed and implemented, enabling visitors to select the level and type of interpretation they want, presenting a wider range of stories, exhibits and experiences. An outdoor First World War activity area was opened in 2017, allowing visitors to experience or imagine some of the formative influences upon Bethune. Improvements to accessibility have been made, including a wheelchair lift to the historic house (2017) and paved pathways (2018).

## 4.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site in 20 years.

Bethune Memorial House is an authentic, living memorial marking the birth and early years of Norman Bethune, and giving insight into the influences which shaped his life’s direction and choices. The site is a hub of stories, ideas, and networks of people inspired by Bethune’s legacy—larger than life, daring, brilliant, outspoken, and most of all, compassionate.

Dr. Norman Bethune, a great Canadian hero, is celebrated as the man who planted the seeds of a public healthcare system, created Canada’s global reputation as a nation with a social conscience, and invited generations around the world to think of the needs of others before their own. Saving countless lives, and continuing to inspire others to follow suit, is a manifestation of his courage, travels, innovative spirit and getting medical care out to the needy. Regardless of borders or backgrounds, he treated all with equal care.

By celebrating his great achievements and humanitarian ideals, others can be inspired, strengthened and exhorted to do the same in their own journeys. As a product of this belief, and with the help of partners, Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site will be a place of inspiration and dialogue for Canadians and visitors.

Deeper connections rife with meaning and enjoyment will captivate a diverse range of Canadian and international audiences throughout the year. Bethune Memorial House will



become a different kind of gathering place in which the local, national, international, and Indigenous communities, take ownership and pride.

In 20 years, Bethune Memorial House will:

- Be an important international meeting place for networks of people to share stories, ideas and inspiration related to Bethune’s legacy.
- Foster respectful relationships with local and Indigenous communities to present meaningful programming that resonates with all visitors.
- Move visitors, volunteers and partners to act as proud ambassadors of Bethune’s values, achievements and humanitarian ideals.
- Inspire dialogue between Canadians and visitors to create a hub for ideas and collaboration.
- Tailor experiences, with the help of partners, to ensure visitors engage in interactive, compelling, and provocative programs throughout the year.

## 5.0 Key Strategies

Two key strategies frame the management direction for Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site for the next 10 years. The strategies and corresponding objectives and targets focus on achieving the vision for the site through an integrated approach to site management. Targets have been prioritized with specific dates where feasible. Where no dates have been referenced, the target will be achieved within the period of the plan based on opportunities, annual priorities and capacity of Parks Canada. Annual implementation updates will be provided to partners, stakeholders, and the general public.

### **Key Strategy 1: Facilitating a personal connection to the Bethune legacy through visitor experience**

This strategy aims at actively managing both the capacity of the site during peak times, and the diverse needs and expectations of visitors so that Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site continues to offer relevant, outstanding and tailored experiences. Authentic diversified visitor experiences will be flexible enough to adapt to crowd sizes and visitor types, ranging from small groups to larger audiences; from Chinese tourists to local school groups. Richer, enhanced opportunities to experience this story will be offered outside of peak times so that visitors gain an appreciation of Bethune’s legacy. This strategy will also focus on understanding visitor needs, achieving high levels of satisfaction and inspiring visitors to return. Ultimately visitors will become ambassadors for the site, which in turn will contribute to partnering and volunteer initiatives.

**Objective 1.1:** Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site offers programming, exhibits and events that connect with a diversity of visitors inspiring them to explore, enjoy and to return.

#### Targets

- By 2023, a premium program is in place in lower visitation periods, which attracts a more involved audience by offering a much deeper understanding of Bethune’s life and legacy.
- By 2027, the site is recognized as “a place of inspiration,” where visitors, volunteers and virtual visitors continue to be inspired by the legacy of Dr. Bethune.

- Service to the public in Mandarin continues to be offered when possible, to meet the needs of the high percentage of visitors for whom this is their first language.
- Research continues to inform the development of the site and presentation of its stories. Through improving our understanding of Bethune and his legacy, and the evolving needs and expectations of visitors, the site continues to provide accurate and authentic experiences for visitors.
- Through these initiatives, visitor satisfaction ratings remain over 90%, on the next State of the Site Assessment.

**Objective 1.2:** A wider range of visitor experiences are featured at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site and are designed to meet seasonal aspects, visitor needs, length of stay and to facilitate access.

#### Targets

- By 2022, the need and feasibility of providing opportunities to experience the site in non-peak seasons and times are identified, so as to better manage visitation growth.
- By 2025, a new efficient admission system is implemented to assist with visitor program selection, timing and to manage visitor patterns throughout peak periods.
- By 2026, customized approaches are in place resulting in making the site and experiences personally relevant, age appropriate, easy to access, and welcoming to all (including those with disabilities and mobility considerations).
- The efficiency and adaptability of facilities and processes are continuously evaluated, for visitor flow, comfort, exits, routing, and accessible space during the operational season.

**Objective 1.3:** Cultural resources and landscapes are well protected at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site and contribute to telling the stories and enhancing visitor programming.

#### Targets

- By 2023, more historical objects and stakeholder gifts to the site are cycled out from storage, displayed in appropriate locations and leveraged to tell the site's stories, whether at the site, or with partners.
- By 2025, the historical objects which best contribute to the site's visitor experience have been evaluated and identified.
- By 2025, a long-term maintenance plan is in place that supports the reduction of operational greenhouse gas emissions and which adds resiliency to the site in a changing climate.
- Over the course of the next ten years, the cultural resources and assets are maintained in good condition.
  - Ongoing asset maintenance considers cultural landscape components at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site (e.g. aging trees replaced with appropriate species).
  - The site continues to influence the development of the local community in a manner compatible with the cultural landscape.

### **Key Strategy 2: Partnering strategically to benefit visitors and Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site**

This strategy aims to build and develop partnerships that maintain and improve the quality and diversity of the programs offered at, or on behalf of Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site. Secondly, it will improve partner appreciation, support and continued protection of cultural resources and messages, beyond the boundaries of the

site. Thirdly, the site will endeavour to capitalize on the credibility accrued by the Bethune legacy to introduce Parks Canada to a broader audience, in particular, of Chinese and Spanish descent.

A partnering strategy will focus on identifying opportunities, key partners and stakeholders, and engaging with them on behalf of Canada to better position Parks Canada's role, responsibilities and capabilities at Bethune Memorial House site and beyond. Valued existing partnerships will be maintained through regular, personal contact and the candid exchange of ideas. Partnerships will play a key role in the delivery of some new programming and will also enable the site to manage the range of requests received in a manner that is mutually beneficial.

Establishing relationships with Indigenous partners will be foundational for integrating Indigenous stories and perspectives at the site. There are opportunities to share stories related to Bethune's service during the world wars, and to Bethune's Métis ancestry.

**Objective 2.1:** Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site forges new partnerships which contribute to diversifying the visitor experience and encouraging target markets to visit the site.

#### Targets

- By 2022, Parks Canada has formed an advisory group with partners and stakeholders to celebrate successes, identify areas for improvement and seek guidance from diverse perspectives.
- By 2023, a partnering strategy is developed.
- By 2025, new partnerships are in place to enhance visitor experience, to promote to target markets and to benefit from international opportunities.
- By 2026, Parks Canada has adapted programs and outreach to key audiences such as school and regional residents, to increase visits outside of peak periods.
- By 2026, partnering and marketing initiatives are in place that target families, youth, local audiences, and inbound Chinese people visiting Canadian friends and family.
- Where appropriate, the site engages in the exchanges of research, staff, exhibits, or other resources with partners, in an effort to maintain and build a network of support.

**Objective 2.2:** Visitors and Canadians build meaningful connections to Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site as awareness of the site grows.

#### Targets

- Starting in 2021, more opportunities to learn about or experience the broader Parks Canada service offer are made available for visitors to Bethune Memorial House—especially those from demographics underrepresented in current Parks Canada clientele.
- By 2024, a volunteer offer is developed in which people are inspired by some of the ideals (charity, compassion, and equality) and legacy of Dr. Bethune to bring others to the site, or to contribute time or other resources to site initiatives and partnerships.
- Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site is regularly featured in social, new, and/or traditional media.
- On an annual basis, at least one targeted marketing activity is implemented.

**Objective 2.3:** Collaboration with Indigenous partners identifies the possible venues to increase their connection with Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site.

#### Targets

- Within the next five years, relationships are established and ongoing dialogue with Indigenous partners is occurring regularly.
- By 2023, connections such as regional Indigenous service in the world wars and Bethune's Métis connection, are identified, leveraged and highlighted.
- By 2025, work has begun toward achieving mutual objectives with Indigenous partners at Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site.

## 6.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* prepared by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada, requires a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of all plans and policies submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects.

A strategic environmental assessment was undertaken on this management plan, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:

Many positive effects will occur as a result of the implementation of the plan, for example: several targets are identified that aim to improve visitor experience and remove the seasonal stress on the site by improving the offers to visitors in lower seasons to better distribute visitation temporally. The biggest positive environmental effect of this plan will be the development of a long-term maintenance plan that supports a reduction of operational greenhouse gas emissions and ongoing maintenance work that considers cultural landscape components and the site. The management plan also supports the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy goals of Greening Government and Safe and Healthy Communities.

Targets identified in the management plan that could potentially result in negative environmental effects include cycling more historical objects and stakeholder gifts out of storage and into displays; and adapting facilities to improve visitor flow, comfort, exits, and routing. In both cases, the risk is relatively low and can be mitigated with the proper application of existing standards, guidelines, legislation, and policies. Operations at the site are required to mitigate impacts on climate according to Greening Government requirements in support of the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.

Indigenous partners, stakeholders, and the public were consulted on the draft management plan, including a summary of the draft strategic environmental assessment. Feedback was considered and incorporated into the strategic environmental assessment and management plan as appropriate.

There are no important negative environmental effects anticipated from the implementation of the management plan. Individual projects at the site will be evaluated separately under the *Impact Assessment Act*, or successor legislation, as necessary.