



## Stone by Stone Province House Conservation Project



Province House National Historic Site is currently undergoing an extensive conservation project. Built more than 175 years ago, Province House is a complex building, and its conservation presents a unique challenge of rehabilitating the structure while respecting its character-defining heritage elements.

The Government of Canada is proudly investing in the long-term preservation of Province House so it can be

enjoyed by future generations. For more information about Province House, please visit our website: [www.parkscanada.gc.ca/provincehouse](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/provincehouse)

This periodic newsletter showcases the stories of Province House and the efforts being made to save this iconic piece of our cultural heritage.

### Quick Tips for Visitors

Even though Province House is closed for conservation, Parks Canada continues to ensure the story of the building is told through collaboration with the Confederation Centre of the Arts. Explore “**The Story of Confederation**” exhibit at the Confederation Centre of the Arts (upper foyer), which includes an interactive replica of the Confederation Chamber.

**Admission for individuals is free. Fees apply to groups of 10+ and require an advance booking.** To inquire about a group booking, please contact: [boxoffice@confederationcentre.com](mailto:boxoffice@confederationcentre.com).

**November - May**  
Saturday, 10am - 3pm.

**June**  
Monday to Saturday, 10am – 4pm.

**July - September**  
Monday to Saturday, 10am – 4pm.  
Sunday, 12pm – 5pm.



## Additional funding and new completion date

This project began in 2015, following an investigation that showed the foundation, stone walls, windows, and roof needed significant work. Due to its size and complexity, funding has been allocated incrementally and the work has been completed in phases. In February 2020, the Government of Canada announced what was expected to be the final budget allotment for the project with a summer 2022 project completion date. However; the COVID-19 pandemic created workforce and supply chain challenges, material cost increases, and project delays that could not have been anticipated when the project began.

On November 15, 2023, an additional \$46 million was announced for the Province House conservation project. This brings the total investment for the long-term preservation of Province House to \$138 million. The new timeline for completion of the remaining work and reopening to the public is expected to be in 2025.

## Ongoing Conservation Work at Province House National Historic Site

Now that the underpinning exercise (lowering of the basement floor) is complete, contractors have begun pouring the concrete in the basement.

Before this work could get underway, the underground services including septic, water, electrical, and communication conduits had to be installed. The basement floor under the slab is a maze of grey pipes (see photo below). The conduits were buried in a trench then covered with rigid insulation and waterproofing membrane. Rebar grids placed on top of the waterproofing provide structural strength for the floor slab and provide a lattice to attach heating tubes for the new hydronic heating system. “It’s very effective heat, especially for this building,” said Brian Willis, Onsite Project Manager. “It radiates heat into the concrete and stone walls and plays into the whole building.”



The basement floor under the slab is a maze of grey pipes for the underground services including septic, water, electrical, and communication conduits.

The concrete is being poured according to the three main heating zones. The finished concrete slab will be about 5 inches thick with about 8 inches of gravel below it.

Once that work is complete, the plumbers, electricians and communications technicians can begin to tie their systems together through the conduits embedded below the floor.

Above grade, plaster elements and woodwork is underway. The plaster team is currently prefabricating plaster moldings and medallions. Most of the decorative elements were made off site, however some of that work needs to happen in situ where the walls are not plumb, level, and square. In total, the crew is replacing about 2,000 linear feet of cornice and 18 medallions in the building. The team is also preparing to plaster the walls inside the building. The walls consist of three coats: the first layer consists of lime, sand, and hair; the second layer consists of lime and sand; and the third layer consists of lime plaster. Before that work can get underway, the existing plaster walls and ceilings need to be stripped of paint and have their edges prepared to seamlessly join with the new plaster.

“It’s painstaking what they are doing now and highly specialized,” said Willis.

Floor repair work is also proceeding at the site. The carpentry team is replacing any worn or rotten pieces with white pine – the same material used originally. The team did find a section of old hardwood flooring in excellent shape in the east pavilion, and they plan on refinishing that section.

The window trims (the casework that hides the gaps between the walls and the windows) is being repaired at a specialized facility in Ottawa, Ont. Once restored, these will be shipped to the site to be reinstalled.



The onsite carpentry team is currently examining the conditions of the doors and doorframes. During Phase 1 of the conservation project, the doors were removed and the casings and moldings were left in place and encased with protective covering. This is the first time the protective coverings have been removed in 7 years. Most of them are in good shape, however some repair work is needed. The team has stripped the doors (including the hardware) and are in the process of repairing any cracks or splits in the wood.

The design, development, and installation of the new visitor experience offer at Province House National Historic Site, is ongoing. The Exhibit Project team is currently working on content development and exhibit design. For a more information, please see the “The stories of Province House” below:



The carpentry team is replacing any worn or rotten pieces of the floors with white pine – the same material used originally.

## The stories of Province House

In the same way that the building has been disassembled and is being put back together, the stories of Province House National Historic Site are being taken apart and reassembled in a way that reflects different voices. Parks Canada is taking steps to ensure that the new exhibits commemorate the incredible history of this place, explore the events that have happened here, and reframe the way that stories are told - to be more collaborative and inclusive. The stories that characterize the place will be broadened to add new perspectives and new layers of understanding that are based in contemporary society’s interpretation of the past.

There are many people working to ensure the project meets these objectives. The Exhibit Project team is made up of historians, curators, and built heritage and visitor experience experts from Parks Canada, L’nuéy, UPEI, and the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation, as well as staff from the Legislative Assembly. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee includes representatives from the Confederation Centre of the Arts, the City of Charlottetown, Tourism PEI, and the Island’s Black and Acadian communities. Along with the First Nations Advisory Circle, these core groups have been working closely together with the contracted design and content development teams to determine what stories need to be told at Province House and how those stories should be presented to visitors.



In-person meetings with W3 Design Group in March 2024.

In March 2022, the project suffered the loss of the contracted design team following the insolvency of the firm. In fall of that year, Parks Canada contracted a new design team, W3 Design Group, to move the exhibit design forward. W3 Design Group based their work on the conceptual design plan that was previously completed with the Exhibit Project team and stakeholders. Their first task was to develop a schematic design package, which began to develop the ideas and initial sketches from the conceptual design. The 50% Schematic Design package was delivered in March 2023. In April, W3 presented the package to the project team and stakeholder groups during in-person meetings that took place in Charlottetown. Feedback from the Exhibit Project team, Stakeholder Advisory Committee and First Nations Advisory Circle guided the design team's work to develop the 100% Schematic Design, delivered in June 2023.

script, images, and captions, was delivered in July 2023. A very comprehensive tiered review process was put in place after receiving the second draft of the content. By tiered, we mean that after the first-tier review, the text is revised based on that group's comments, before it is passed to the next tier or group. This process has seen more than 50 people review this draft from different areas of expertise, and from different perspectives.

Many discussions - with many people - have been held to finesse the exhibit elements to ensure that the experience is in line with project goals and objectives. We have engaged at different points throughout the development of the exhibit: when we were establishing themes, messages, and stories, when we were developing draft texts, and now, as we are finalizing the visitor experience and content of the exhibit.

The Content Development team is in the process of recording 15 'first person testimonies' that will be included in the audio guide for the exhibit. These testimonies will give stakeholders the opportunity to tell their stories and truths about Province House in their own words.

The work in the coming year will mark the final stages of the exhibit project. The third draft of content will be delivered in June 2024. After reviewing this draft, the content will be finalized in fall 2024, and translated in French and Mi'kmaq. The design team is working towards 100% detailed design to be delivered in July 2024, which will finalize all elements. Fabrication is scheduled for early in 2025. The Province House Exhibit Project team is also working with the Phase 3 Construction team to coordinate all the electrical, data, and lighting for the exhibit as well as the exterior landscape to ensure that the exterior elements reflect the messages from the new exhibit inside the building.



W3 Design Group with the Exhibit Project team at Province House.

The same process of package delivery followed by review and discussion took place in February 2024, when W3 Design Group delivered 50% detailed design package. This package included more refined drawings, models, and other visual design sketches based on elements that were approved during the Schematic Design phase. Additional in-person meetings took place in Charlottetown with W3 Design Group in March 2024.

Content development and interpretive writing has continued in close coordination with the exhibit design. Almost every decision made about the exhibit content affects exhibit design and the two teams work collaboratively to ensure that all the pieces of the exhibit fit together cohesively.

In November 2022, the Exhibit Project team received and reviewed the first draft of the content. It was exciting to see the thoughts and ideas that went into the interpretive plan put into words. The second draft, which included interpretive panel text, audio guide



Exhibit Project team sitting around Confederation Chamber replica April 2023.



# The decorative elements of Province House



Some of the intricate decorative plaster work is created using silicon molds.

A group of skilled tradespeople from Heritage Grade are using a centuries-old technique to recreate the decorative plaster at Province House National Historic Site.

The plaster work is part of Phase 3 of the Province House conservation project, which focuses on preserving the heritage character-defining elements while bringing the building into the 21st century. The team is being led by traditional plaster specialist Kieran Reid at a workshop in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.



Plasterers pour gypsum plaster on the bench before running the slipper over it to create a cornice (decorative moldings along the top of the interior walls) for Province House National Historic Site.

The decorative elements include the cornice (decorative molding located along the top of an interior wall) and medallions (detailed centrepieces around light fixtures on the ceiling). In total, the crew is replacing about 2,000 linear feet of cornice and 18 medallions in the building.

“We are matching like-for-like,” said Reid. “There are some areas that are going to be left from the 1950s renovation, so we are matching the old and the new and trying to make it all look seamless.”

Reid said the crew is making the moldings off site instead of in situ as this allows them to make the moldings lighter. By making them lighter, they are less likely to crack over time.

The process of making a cornice involves creating a profile that matches the original cornice. There are approximately 10 different cornice profiles in the building. Plasterers apply gypsum plaster with trowels to a bench and then use a slipper (a cutout template made of wood and zinc that matches the profile) and run it along the bench by manually pushing it from one end to the other. This process is carried out about 40-50 times, and it becomes harder with each run. The gypsum gives off a lot of heat as it expands and dries. The slipper will jam if the plasterer is not running it fast enough along the bench.



The slipper- a cutout template made of wood and zinc that is run along the bench to create a cornice.

“It sets really quick, so you have to do it in a space of 20-25 minutes,” said Reid. “It’s quite high pressure and very labour intensive.”

The medallions are made using silicon molds as the deep undercuts and details can’t be run on a bench. Reid said the most decorative elements are the medallions located in the Confederation Chamber and the Legislative Chamber.



A plasterer pushing the slipper along the bench. This process is carried out about 40-50 times within a 20–25-minutes timespan.

“There is a lot of detail in the medallions. They are ornate and there is a lot of different elements in the medallions that tell a story.”

Reid said working on a historic building, such as Province House, means none of the walls are plumb, level, and square. As a result, there is a lot of



Some of the finished decorative cornices designated for Province House National Historic Site.

measuring, cutting and fabrication on site to ensure that every piece fits with the natural settlement of the building.

“This is a pretty old building,” said Reid. “It takes a lot more time and a lot more effort to make it look like it’s always been there.”



Mock-up of the lime plaster walls for Province House National Historic Site.

The team will also be on site making the walls. The walls consist of three coats; the first layer consists of lime, sand, and hair, the second layer consists of lime and sand, and the third layer consists of lime plaster. This kind of wall is durable and fire resistant and allows the walls to breathe and prevents moisture buildup from the exterior stone walls.

Reid said he enjoys the challenges of plaster work in heritage buildings.

“I enjoy it because every day is different,” said Reid. “Every day is a new challenge.”





Isaac Smith's signature, the architect who designed Province House in Charlottetown and supervised the construction of the building between 1843-1847, was found along the underside of the southwest balcony in the Confederation Chamber in spring 2023.

## Mysteries of Province House: Isaac Smith signature

On April 14, 2023, Heather Harris was working on the floor joists along the underside of the southwest balcony in the Confederation Chamber when she noticed some handwriting.

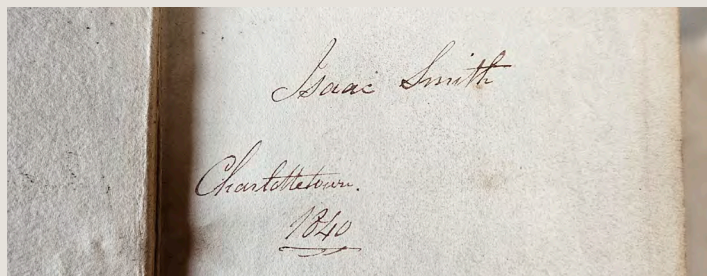
Harris, a graduate from Holland College's Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program, has found several signatures over the course of her involvement with the project and was excited to find another one. She couldn't quite make out what it said, so she called over her colleague, Evan Karl, to help her decipher the cursive script.

There was a pause. "Does that say Smith?" asked Karl.

Harris' initial reaction was one of disbelief at the possibility of finding the signature of Isaac Smith, the architect who designed Province House and supervised the construction of the building between 1843-1847.

"No way. It can't be, can it?" responded Harris.

At that moment, Brian Willis, Onsite Project Manager, walked into the room. They called him over to look at it.



Isaac Smith's signature in family bible.

"When we looked at it, the way it was written in the cursive script, it did look like two words," said Willis. "It looked like it could have been Mrs. Smith or Mr. I Smith. We thought for a while that Mrs. Smith may have signed it, too."

It is common practice for a builder to leave his signature behind in an obscure location. Until then, Smith's signature had not been found.

"They sign in places that are not obvious," said Willis. "This was the very definition of that. There is no chance you would have found this signature unless you were restoring the building."



Ian Scott, family relative to Isaac Smith's ancestor Kathy Large, holding a photo of Isaac Smith.

On November 15, 2023, a very special and unforgettable moment unfolded during a stakeholder tour at Province House.

Kathy Large is the great-great-great granddaughter of Smith and was at the site with her brother-in-law Ian Scott. They happened to have some artifacts with them that day which included a family bible with Smith's signature.

Kathy Large, the great-great-great-granddaughter of Isaac Smith, the architect who designed Province House in Charlottetown.



The signature on the underside of the southwest balcony was quickly pointed out to Large and Scott. The excitement in the room was palpable. “Once we saw the signature in the bible, we knew it was Isaac Smith’s signature on a rough piece of wood instead of a smooth piece of paper,” said Willis. “I think he signed it upside down because the gap between Mr. I and Smith is so wide.”

Harris had the opportunity to meet Large and Scott and shared the story about her finding the signature.

“I just happened to be at right place at the right time. If I had been there by myself, I could have easily seen it, not make out the writing, and forgot about it,” said Harris. “It was really neat to chat with his ancestor and make that connection.”



Heather Harris of Charlottetown found the only known signature of Isaac Smith at Province House National Historic Site. Harris is a graduate of Holland College’s Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program and worked at the site following her studies.

## Lowering the cellar floor at Province House

The basement of Province House National Historic Site will become a useable space for the first time in the building’s more than 175-year history.

The contractor, Amcon Limited, installed concrete underpinning and lowered the cellar floor by one meter to create enough headroom so the basement could accommodate accessible and inclusive washroom facilities, a lunchroom, storage facility and a mechanical and electrical service room.

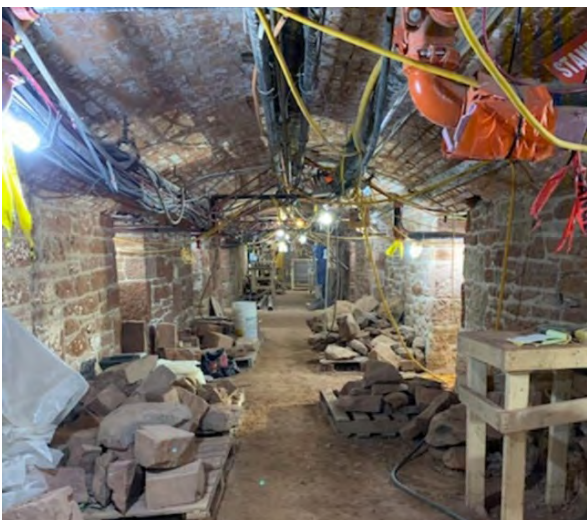
This work began in the fall of 2022 and took about 6 months to complete.

The team could only underpin small sections of a wall at one time otherwise the excavation could potentially affect the integrity of the wall and its ability to support the weight of the building. The basement was done in 130 sections with an average of two sections completed per day.

“The individual sections were done, not randomly but sequentially and spaced away from one another, throughout the building so as not to put too much pressure on any one section of the building,” explained Brian Willis, Onsite Project Manager.

By doing these pieces intermittently, not in one continuous row, the contractor had to pre-determine the finished plane of the new foundation walls so when complete, the walls would appear straight, not wavy, along their full length.

The process involved digging a hole about a meter long and a meter deep under the interior foundation walls. Thankfully, modern-day technology made this process slightly easier with the use of pneumatic shovels to loosen up the soil and a giant vacuum was used to remove the debris. A total of 90 tandem loads of soil and rock were removed from the basement during the process.



Before the basement consolidation work. Electrical wires used to hang down from the low ceiling.



After the basement consolidation work. The basement floor was lowered by one meter so that it can be a useable and accessible space.

“The vacuum saved a lot of time,” said Willis. “The way it would have been done back in the day was with a shovel, bucket, pick and wheelbarrows.”

After a hole was dug, a footing with reinforcing steel was poured, followed by vertical formwork to the underside of the existing masonry wall.



A bottom stone in the masonry wall was removed so the crew had access to pour concrete into the forms before moving on to an adjacent section. It took about 3 days for a section of concrete to cure. Once cured, a light sand blasting of the concrete was completed for consistency of appearance.

The most challenging aspect of the basement was the elevator shaft as it had to be lowered by three meters.

The previous elevator did not service the basement, therefore did not require an elevator pit. An elevator pit is a space below the surface of the lowest landing where it houses the elevator mechanics such as the elevator cab floor and various mechanical components.

The team couldn't employ the same techniques that were used for the other sections of the basement because of something called the soils angle of repose. The soils angle of repose is the steepest angle a pile of soil can tolerate before collapsing.

"If you dig a hole right beside a load bearing wall, you are potentially undermining the ability of that wall to carry the load above it," explains Willis. "For every



After photo of the elevator shaft.

meter you go down, you have to stay a meter away from the load bearing wall."

The challenge with the elevator pit was that they couldn't stay 3 meters away from the load bearing wall while digging 3 meters down. Tim Chandler, Senior Project Manager with Public Services and Procurement Canada, solved the issue of the angle of repose by proposing the use of steel box to support the pressure of the soil that would occur when excavating the elevator pit.

Chandler came up with this idea during a brainstorm session with PCL Construction, Harbourside Engineering Consultants and Public Services and

Procurement Canada team members. At the time, he was thinking about how trench boxes are used during roadside excavations and proposed using this concept in the basement.

"As the Project Manager, you don't always get to conceptualize and design these engineering solutions," said Chandler. "It's not my every day, so it's kind of fun throwing out ideas like that with good people that can take it the rest of the way."

Once engineers signed off on the concept, the work was carried out by the contractor and took about 1.5 months to complete.

The process involved bolting steel panels together and installing anchors into the ground. The team would excavate about 300 millimeters at a time and then activate pneumatic jacks attached to the anchors, pulling the box into the ground, and taking the pressure of the adjacent soil. The anchors had to be brought down incrementally and at the same speed, otherwise the box could twist and jam in the excavation.

"This all had to happen stealthily because you can't have any vibrations in a masonry building," said Willis. "This whole process, aside from the portico foundation work, was the most technically challenging aspect of the conservation project."



Tim Chandler

### Fun fact:

A total of 90 tandem loads of soil and rock was removed during the basement consolidation process.

# The windows of Province House

The 101 heritage windows at Province House National Historic Site have been carefully and meticulously restored.

Two of the original windows were conserved by students from Holland College's Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program. The remaining window restoration work was carried out by two different contractors.

The original plan was to have the windows installed by summer 2021; however, the firm that was awarded the contract to restore and preserve the heritage windows went into insolvency. The contractor had only completed about 70 per cent of the restoration work on the windows.

The package was retendered, and the contract was awarded to Heritage Grade in January 2021. The windows were transported from Barrie, Ont. to Ottawa, Ont. where the remaining abatement and repair work was carried out. The frames were then carefully packaged and transported back to Province House for installation. Heritage Grade completed a successful window installation mock-up in December 2021 and reinstalled most of the windows by summer 2022. There are still 2 windows in the stairwell that will be installed once interior finishes are complete.

Gary Loo, of Wheatley River, PEI, is a finish carpenter and has been involved with the Province House conservation project since 2021. He assisted Heritage Grade with the assembly process of the windows (sashes, weights, balancers, brass components, and sash cords), onsite restoration work, and installation.

The windows in the building vary in size: 47" wide and 22" high in the basement; 53" wide and 85" high on the first floor; 57" wide and 97" high on the second floor; and 53" wide; and 48" high on the third floor. The windows with the bow top on the first floor were the largest measuring 53" wide and 207" high and were tricky to repair because of the curvature in the wood.

Loo said reinstalling the windows was not an easy process because the size of the window openings had changed in areas where the masonry walls



One of the conserved windows at Province House National Historic Site.

were completely dismantled and reassembled.

"They are now plumb and square," explained Loo. "But the windows that had come out were not necessarily so."

The windows where the walls had been repaired in situ, meaning restored in place, also proved challenging. Modern day standards require airspace between the stones and the wood to prevent rot. Weather stripping was also added to improve the energy efficiency. This meant there were a lot of alterations done onsite.

Loo said the onsite restoration work required a lot of skill and patience.

"Every window in the building is different," said Loo. "There was a lot



Gary Loo, of Wheatley River, PEI, has been involved with the Province House conservation project since 2021 and assisting with the assembly process, onsite restoration work, and installation. The windows in the library (pictured) were some of the more challenging windows to install due to the natural bow in the wall.

of measuring and making adjustments, as necessary." Straight grain Douglas fir was used to replace rotten sections of a frame. This type of wood was chosen because it worked well with the old growth pine of the original windows.

"It has good longevity and durability," said Loo. "It's all been well quartered with heritage linseed oil paint."



Loo said the original windows were in surprisingly good condition.

“It is amazing that wooden windows would last that long. I think a large part of that is because the wood that these windows were built with were trees that were probably a couple of hundred of years old so they have that natural preservative, if you will, compared to a wood that you use today.”

One room that required extensive consideration was the library. The long wall facing north is bowed and there were many discussions about whether the window would go in straight or follow the bend. Eventually, it was determined to follow the bow of the wall because there would have been a noticeable separation between the wall and the frames.

Loo has been a finish carpenter since the 1970s and has worked on various new builds, old houses and historic churches across the province, North America, and Europe. He says Province House is one of the oldest buildings he has worked on.

“It is certainly the most historic,” said Loo. “It’s a source of pride for me to work on a project that will last decades, maybe centuries, after I’m gone.”



Two of the original windows were conserved by students from Holland College’s Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program. Students began this process in 2019, under the guidance of Josh Silver, Learning Manager for the Heritage Retrofit Carpentry program. An expert conservator also worked with students in this exceptional training experience. The students reinstalled the windows at the site in May 2022.

## Restoring the roof at Province House

The new slate roof at Province House National Historic Site combines traditional materials with modern day elements that will ensure less on-going maintenance and repair work are needed going forward.

The roof has been a source of chronic problems for this historic building. Over the years, water infiltration through the roof near the eaves as well as the annual freeze/thaw cycle has been the greatest enemy of the building’s interior and exterior stone walls.

The last time the roof was replaced was in the 1980s and the slate material came from a quarry in Vermont. Since the quarry was unable to supply replacement materials, the Province House conservation project team had to search for similar slate material elsewhere. After a fair bit of research, the team was able to source slate material from North Wales that is original to when it was first constructed between 1843-1847.



A drone image of the completed roof work.

“A big part of the renovation project is the roof,” said Mick Davies, DFS Site Consultant at Province House National Historic Site. “The work we’ve done to the roof is going to protect the building for many years to come.”

Robertson Restoration specialize in historical restoration and carried out the roof work at the site. They removed all the old slate and roof coverings



back to the rafters. They proceeded to replace the rotten rafters and brought the roofline to the edge of the stonework. The new design involves using copper cladding around the gutters and flashings to help create a seal. Under the slate, there are two layers of plywood with two-inch thick thermal insulation, vapour barriers and a waterproofing membrane.

Mike Copan of Robertson Restoration has 20 years experience in historical restoration and received his training in Scotland and England. Copan has worked on various historic buildings across the country.

“We are trying to keep it to the timeframe around the same time the building was actually built,” said Copan. “We are using better underlayment. Back then, they would use tar and tar paper. With today’s technology, the longevity of these products are far superior to what they had available 100 years ago.”

The new design and modern elements ensures water infiltration won’t be an issue moving forward. The roof work was completed in August 2022.

“We have done a really good job of sealing the building,” said Davies. “I don’t believe that we will have any problems with the roof, like we have had in the past.”



Nicolle Gallant, Project Manager for the Province House conservation project, on site when the roof work was underway. The new roof combines traditional materials with modern day elements ensuring water infiltration won’t be an issue moving forward.



A close-up image of the new slate shingles at Province House National Historic Site. The new slate is sourced from the same location when Province House was constructed between 1843-1847.





# Profile Series

## Brian Willis is a very familiar face at Province House National Historic Site.

Willis, who grew up on Kingston Road in Prince Edward Island, has worn several hats over the course of his involvement with the Province House conservation project including construction site superintendent, heritage conservation specialist and most recently as the site-based project manager.

“I’ve spent a lot of hours in this building. I haven’t missed very many days and I’ve seen and met just about everyone who has been on site.”

Willis arrived at the site in April 2017 and works closely with Public Services and Procurement Canada and Parks Canada. He is the conduit for everyone including consultants, inspectors, subcontractors, suppliers, and clients.

“I try and keep everyone aligned,” said Willis. “For example, if the architects specify that something needs to happen, but the suppliers have something else in mind, you have to flag that. You have to know what is coming, what is needed and then you have to layer all that with simple things, like the weather, traffic, parades, holidays and labour availability.”

He said one of the biggest and most important elements of his job is monitoring site safety and ensuring contingency plans are in place with the Project’s general contractor.

“You are responsible, literally, and figuratively, for everyone’s health and safety at the site. If something is wrong, they come to you.”

His favourite part of the job is connecting with people and giving guided tours of the building to project team members for the first time. He estimates there have been between 500-600 people who have worked on this historic conservation project.

“They will remember this moment in their careers. It certainly would mark a high point.” said Willis. “For me, in the heritage field, it represents the very peak of what I see as possible for a building on PEI.”

Willis said he sometimes thinks about what it would have been like to build this grand structure in the heart of Charlottetown between 1843-1847. Architect Isaac Smith and his team would have had to rely on doing everything by hand from digging to using brute strength to haul exterior stones from the boat at the harbour.



Willis also imagines the work would have been quieter, with only the sounds of people talking and implements tooling stone and wood.

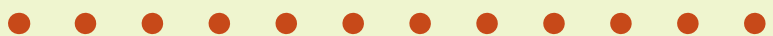
“I’m enthralled as to what it would have taken for Isaac Smith to build this building.” said Willis “It was really ambitious at the time. It would have been on display and a real challenge for him. I don’t think it was easy at all.”

Willis said the building was never perfect, but that it was a result of the limitations on the materials and technologies available at the time.

“Smith relied on his common sense as a builder. He was a smart guy and did a tremendous job with the resources he had at his disposal,” said Willis. “Things are different today. There is a better and easier way to do things. I like to think, if he were alive today, he wouldn’t make the same mistakes that he did back then.”

Willis said the building likely won’t need this level of conservation for another 180-200 years.

“We are doing the right thing by this building. What we have done is excellent work and we’ve got the building back to a state that is better than the original,” said Willis. “We’ve made Isaac Smith proud.”



## Profile Series

### Island stonemason Justin Guignon is conserving heritage buildings across Prince Edward Island, one stone at a time.

Guignon of Hartsville worked at Province House National Historic Site between 2019-2022, bringing over a decade of stonemasonry experience with him while assisting RJW Stonemasons Ltd. in conserving the interior and exterior stones on the building.

“I was ecstatic when I first got the job. I’ve worked on most of the heritage buildings within a 5 or 6 block radius and I’ve always wanted to work on this building,” said Guignon. “It’s been a fantastic opportunity for me and for anyone else that has gotten to work on this project. The work is a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

The masonry work was one of the most labour-intensive aspects of the Province House conservation project. Stonemasons replaced approximately 1,300 stones on the building’s exterior and repaired approximately 3,800 stones. On the building’s interior, approximately 108 cubic metres of stone was replaced.

Guignon assisted in conserving most of the rooms in the building but worked extensively on the interior walls on the pavilions, third floor and on the exterior walls on the south-west rebuild, including closures and ashlar replacements.

He notes the condition of the stones on the third floor were in particularly poor condition.

“The higher you went up in the building, the more damage there seemed to be and that’s in large part due to the water infiltration from the roof system over the years,” said Guignon. “There was a lot more extensive rebuilding at the top, and as you came down, we were able to keep some areas intact.”

The stones were sourced from similar locations when the building was constructed between 1843-1847. Wallace, NS stones were used to replace the exterior stones and Kellys Cross, PEI stones were used to replace the interior stones. The exterior stones were extremely heavy, ranging from 200-2500 pounds. The process for replacing a stone was laborious and could take several days to complete. It involved removing the existing stone safely without damaging adjacent stones; preparing the opening to receive the new stone; ensuring the new stone was sized perfectly; setting up and modifying scaffold and rigging equipment for the lift and placement of the stone; spreading the mortar and installing the shim; bringing the stone to the work area, lifting, and placing it; and pointing the mortar into the joints around the stone.



Stonemasons also had to be conscious of load bearing stones and aware of the physics occurring within a wall panel otherwise it could result in an instantaneous wall collapse. The size of the pockets varied over the course of the project. At the beginning, only small pockets could be opened at a time. As the project progressed, larger pockets could be opened as stonemasons became more familiar with the conditions of the building. The depth of a pocket ranged between 700mm to 1500mm for the interior stone and a few metres for the exterior stone. The tight 3-5 millimetres tolerance combined with the fragility of the material made it extremely difficult and delicate work.

Guignon said masonry work requires attention to detail, patience and problem-solving skills.

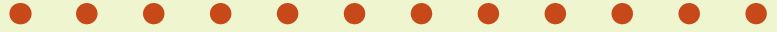
“It’s tedious and dusty and almost everything you do is not incredibly fast if you want it to be done right,” said Guignon. “Sometimes you’d spend a couple of days putting one complicated stone into the wall so to walk around and see the hundreds of stones that have been installed, you realize how much work went into this building.”



Guignion said this was a great opportunity for his resume and that he learned a lot from the many talented stonemasons involved with the project.

“It’s an artisan part of the trade and the people that do it, are generally very passionate about it,” said Guignion, as he looks around at the recently

conserved interior stones at Province House National Historic Site. “It’s very rewarding in seeing this, how everything is finished now. It’s an accumulation of blood, sweat and tears.”



## Profile Series

### **Kate Jordan has a gift when it comes to speaking the language of objects.**

“Objects, like people, live lives,” said Jordan. “It makes the world a pretty magical place when you learn how to read them and listen to them.”

Jordan has a background in museum interpretation. She worked at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax, NS as well as the Canada Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa, Ont. The latter helped her realize her interest in curating.

“I started realizing the capacity that objects have to help people discover stories and really carrying stories that are sometimes deeper than what people can carry themselves.”

She accepted a position with Parks Canada as a Curator in May 2021, and shortly thereafter joined the Province House Exhibit Project Team.

In her role as Curator, she facilitated relationships between people and objects as well as the relationships between objects within the building.

She advised on the refurbishing’s to help visitors immerse themselves in a historical atmosphere. This involved some extensive research on her end, from carpeting to hangings to lighting. Through her research, she learned the carpet underlay was canvas and that it was tied to the local sail making economy. Additionally, she discovered the paint and textiles used revealed the sorts of trade and economy PEI was involved in at that time.

“Everything has a story to tell and sometimes you end up doing really deep dives into things you never expected to be an expert in.”

Another aspect of her job was sharing material culture interpretation with the writers for the new interpretive exhibits at Province House National Historic Site.

Her favourite object in the exhibit is the snuff box-



a small ornamental box used to hold a mixture of ground tobacco and scented oils.

“It’s just a beautiful object,” said Jordan. “It also contains so many stories surrounding rituals and social customs.”

She now works as a Cultural Resource Management Advisor for Parks Canada. Although her role has changed, she still advises on the material culture.

She notes that her involvement with the project did not come without its challenges. One challenge was recognizing that some objects were used as vehicles for exclusion and contain hurtful and harmful stories. Another challenge was curating a colonial space where the stories are being broadened to include narratives and voices not previously presented.

“The approach we are taking in terms of historic refurbishing is not to suggest that there were objects, peoples and stories in spaces where they weren’t historically, but to rather leave lots of space for different ways of representing those stories, whether it’s through wall quotes, whether it’s through digital interactives, whether it’s through spaces for reflection, it’s about leaving space to recognize the absence of those stories.”

Despite these challenges, Jordan said she has thoroughly enjoyed her time on the project, seeing

it through from the very early stages to where it is presently.

“I think what has been so amazing about working on this project is that everyone is welcome in the room and the project is being managed in a way that really prioritizes the people who are working on it,” said Jordan. “I have really great hope that if the

process of working on this project has been so full of vulnerability, learning and growth and love that the result will also be filled with those things.”

