

From the past for the future

by George Brimmell

Construction contracting keeps our heritage alive

So where do you find a blacksmith when you need one – or a leaded glass artisan, or a wood conservator, for that matter?

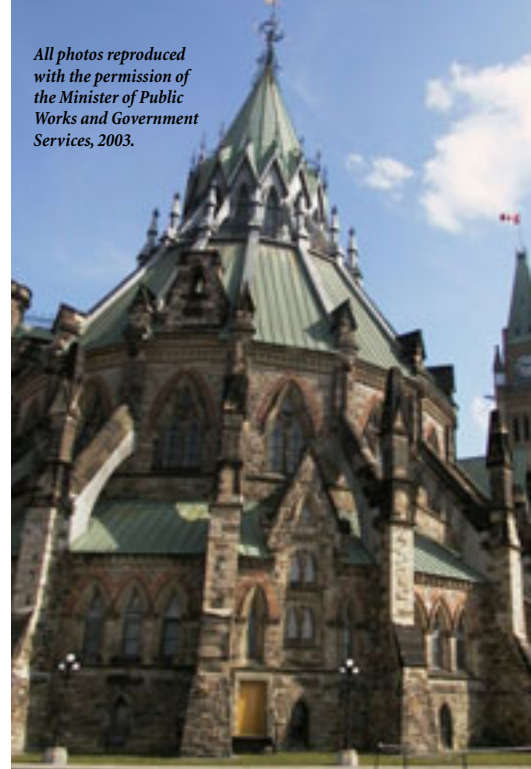
Not your everyday problem, but a recurring challenge for all governments in the heritage preservation business. And the federal government is multi-millions of dollars deep into this activity these days. Fortunately, Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) has been developing a measure of expertise in locating and lassoing these heritage artisans.

Shawn Gardner, manager, Regional Operations and Commodity Management in the

department's Real Property Contracting Directorate, explains. "We treat the heritage buildings in the same way as a new building...in that the basic principles are the same." He adds, "We use the Government Electronic Tendering Service (more commonly known as MERX) to advertise our needs. In the notice that would go up, we would clearly state that it is a heritage building with specialized heritage requirements for the work. We try to identify it there...and that's no different than a brand new building in a 'green' field."

But the difference is how to find the artisans needed. "If there's some very specialized

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Library of Parliament before repairs began.

work – like heritage masonry, or glass, like the stained glass that was renovated in the memorial chamber in the Peace Tower – there's some specialized work that artisans are very good at doing, but their specialization may not be computerized," says Gardner.

"Therefore, if we advertise it on MERX, they may not learn about it. We'd be shooting ourselves in the foot if we leave it only to the MERX system. So for certain requirements we'll try to go to associations...of stonemasons, let's say...or whatever...depending on the type of work that's involved."

There are also some esoteric types of work, such as blacksmithing. "We needed a blacksmith to deal with repair and restoration work on the iron gates at the Wellington Street entrance to Parliament Hill," says Gardner. "Now where do you find a blacksmith these days? Well, we contacted the blacksmith at Upper Canada Village."

Upper Canada Village is a celebrated reconstructed community, on the St. Lawrence River near Cornwall. Artisans such as blacksmiths, broom-makers, dressmakers, tinsmiths, printers using hand-set type, go about their crafts as their forebears would have done generations ago. They're dressed in period costumes, as are serving wenches and others.

"These kinds of artisans know where their peers would be and they were very helpful," says Gardner. "That's how we started, and then we posted the requirements so that others could see them."



Excavation work continues in basement levels.

www.parliamenthill.gc.ca/text/librarywork_chnml ©Parliament Hill

Currently, one of PWGSC's most fascinating, and challenging projects is the \$52 million restoration of the Library of Parliament, a masterpiece of 19th century architecture.

The Library, completed in 1859, was the only component of the Parliament Buildings to come through the devastating fire of February 3, 1916. A smouldering cigar in the parliamentary reading room set the Centre Block ablaze, but a quick-thinking Library employee, M. MacCormac, slammed shut the heavy iron doors in the passage that connected the Library to the main building.

But in 1952, the Library suffered a fire of its own. That fire, caused by faulty wiring, burned in the dome. And after 10 hours, when the blaze was finally extinguished, 200,000 gallons of water had poured off the roof or run down the ceiling, soaking books in the reading room, in the two upper galleries and in many of the underground vaults.

The government contemplated replacing it with a modern structure, but decided to restore the building. It had to be closed for 46 months for the renovations.

Since then the building has suffered from old age, weather and corrosive air pollution. It's also become too small for its growing collections and services, the problem compounded by the need for computers, photocopiers and other electronic gear in a modern library.

So it's being repaired, restored and upgraded – all the way from the weathervane on the pinnacle of the roof down to the ven-



Upper roof structure and weathervane lifted from the Library of Parliament building.

www.parliamenthill.gc.ca/text/librarywork_e.html ©Parliament Hill

tilation system in the deepest sub-basement. Planning started in 1995, the construction in 2002, and it won't be finished until 2005.

"For the Library," says Gardner, "we went for a general contractor...and many general contractors were capable of doing the work. Fuller Construction won the bid – but within the general contract, there are a number of specialized sub-contractors that were required.

"The bookcases are very old mill work, which in certain cases had to be taken apart, then put back together in exactly the same location. It's not something the average carpenter can do."

Gardner says PWGSC "typically goes out on the street, says 'here's the requirement... come one, come all.' But we want to ensure there's a certain skill level and we can do that through a pre-qualification process."

Enter the architect, very much a key player in the enterprise. Four architectural firms are

jointly involved. One of these is Ogilvie and Hogg, of Ottawa, and architect Mike Hogg suggested pre-qualifying sub-trades to ensure that the general contractors bidding for the massive job would have the essential skills and artisans required for the project. PWGSC agreed.

The pre-qualifying procedure ensures that the needed artisans are located and skillful enough to work on the restoration.

"Masonry is always a problem, particularly stone, especially when it has deteriorated," Hogg says. "It takes special skills to do [that sort of restoration and conservation] work. So under this pre-qualification procedure, the general contractor who would be hired had to find a mason who was qualified in doing that sort of work. He also had to carry a specialized wood carver, a specialized wood conservator (the two are different) and a specialist in leaded glass, among other things, as well as specialists skilled in copper roofing."

"We had about eight applications, and ended up with five acceptable bidders. We had to be satisfied that they all had access to these specialties and had the experience to undertake this important project," says Hogg.



Example of damage (efflorescence – seen as a powdery deposit) on the stone arches.

www.parliamenthill.gc.ca/text/librarywork_e.html ©Parliament Hill

Finding good help

As noted in the article, qualified specialists in the disciplines required for heritage preservation are not easily found. The Canadian Heritage Foundation has published a report titled, *Human Resource Issues in the Preservation of Heritage Buildings*, which contains the results of a "first-ever survey of post-secondary institutions offering education and training opportunities in fields associated with heritage preservation."

Recently, Brian Anthony, executive director of the foundation wrote, "Our national capacity to preserve our built heritage is dependent on a number of critical factors, such as effective controls and meaningful incentives... One of these critical factors is a heritage labour force sufficient in number and nature to carry out the vital work of preservation... Do we have enough people in the various preservation fields to meet the ongoing and increasing demand for their talents... can the current heritage labour force meet important qualitative standards, especially in light of the demands of the emergent national conservation standards and guidelines being developed as part of the federal Historic Places Initiative?"

According to the website (www.pc.gc.ca/docs/pc/guide/cehc-chpc/table_E.asp), this initiative began three years ago when two federal government departments – the Department of Canadian Heritage and Parks Canada – began a series of consultations on the "best means to preserve and celebrate Canada's historic places." The participants, which included interested people, elected officials and experts from across Canada, achieved consensus on the following:

- Canadians will have built a culture of heritage conservation.
- Governments will work together to achieve common goals.
- Canadians will have the basic tools to protect historic places.
- The Government of Canada will become a model custodian of historic places.

Heritage works across Canada

Two years ago, Halloween vandals set fire to St. John's Anglican Church in Lunenburg, NS, destroying a historic landmark. A recent federal-provincial contribution (\$1 million) to the \$5 million restoration cost, has spurred the fundraising efforts needed to rebuild.

The St. Boniface, MB, birthplace of world-renowned author Gabrielle Roy (1909-1983), recently restored to its 1918 design, was officially reopened as a museum this summer. Municipal, provincial and federal money helped finance the renovation project, after citizen fundraising – including a special appeal to women across Canada – raised \$155,000 to purchase the building.

Montreal's high-tech business park, Locoshop, is housed in a restored part of the Canadian Pacific Railway's Angus Shops.

In Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company occupies buildings originally constructed for Consumers Gas Company, and Standard Woolen Mills.

In Vancouver, when the CPR's red brick roundhouse was converted into a community centre, the railway turntable was preserved as a permanent reminder of the building's original function.

Near the small Ontario town of Southampton, on Lake Huron, Chantry Island, has emerged a proud heritage site. The 140-year-old light keeper's stone house has been authentically restored to its original appearance. Over three years, the daily log recorded more than 250 volunteers, aged 16 to 85, who worked more than 29,000 hours. Private donations raised over \$180,000, making the project entirely self-supporting.

And finally, probably the best-known example, Manitoba's proud provincial symbol, the Golden Boy, removed from atop the Legislature in downtown Winnipeg, was given a new \$34,000 gold coat, and reinstalled.

Details of this thumbnail rundown of projects, some current, others proudly completed, can be found in recent issues of *Heritage*, published by the Canadian Heritage Foundation (www.heritagecanada.org).

Though it's by no means the biggest job his firm has tackled, "it's the biggest in terms of complexity," says Hogg.

He notes that at the time of the Library's 1952 post-fire renovation, "conservation was not a big thing. As a result, much of the original building was lost which didn't have to be lost." So he and his partners are trying to bring back some of those lost elements such as translucent glass floors at the gallery level and etched glass panels at the end of the book stacks.

Most PWGSC projects are advertised through the MERX. But, says Gardner, "you won't find a stained glass trade, you won't find heritage masonry, you won't find a blacksmith... because, as much as we want to preserve our heritage, there isn't a whole lot of heritage across the country." ■■■

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individual had to submit examples of their work, or in the case of library wood-carvers, had to do a carving and submit a mock-up – one being submitted from as far away as Russia. And, says Hogg, "If that didn't meet the specs, it was 'Sorry, Mr. Contractor, you don't have the right person.' [After all], when you're into that sort of conservation work, you've got to do it properly. It is an important part of our architectural heritage."