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## Introduction

**Nova Scotia** has a rich heritage that is important to its residents and fascinating to visitors from all over the world. In order to preserve and interpret this heritage in a meaningful way, this document presents an Interpretive Master Plan that will guide the province's Heritage Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage as it moves into the future, serving and attracting audiences with engaging and relevant interpretation of the province's natural and cultural heritage.

# 1.1 About This Document

The Heritage Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage for the Province of Nova Scotia commissioned this Interpretive Master Plan. It presents an analysis of the current resources and interpretation in the province – by the Division and outside organizations – as a means of establishing the overall interpretive landscape in the province, and then sets out a master plan for the future of interpretation in the Heritage Division.

Currently, the Division has many great interpretive programs and resources to draw from. The plan presents goals, objectives and strategies that will guide interpretive renewal in the Division, to ensure it is interpreting Nova Scotia's provincially significant stories in ways that are relevant and engaging for visitors. The Heritage Division is competing for its audiences alongside many forms of entertainment and attractions. It must be responsive to both its current and potential future audiences to ensure that it is an important part of the lives of all Nova Scotians.

The Interpretive Master Plan provides a road map for interpretation. It is a long-term process that must be shepherded forward by dedicated staff and resources. Priority actions have been developed to ensure the process begins quickly (in some cases, projects are already underway) and continues to push ahead. In some cases, projects are already underway.

This document features seven (7) sections:

» **1.0 Introduction**

Defines the project background, goals, and methodology as well as the meaning of “provincial significance.”

» **2.0 Current Situation**

Reviews current interpretation and resources in the Heritage Division, other major organizations that interpret Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history, and current audiences.

» **3.0 Interpretive Master Plan Approach**

Outlines goals and objectives for the Master Plan, future audiences and how to engage visitors, as well as best practices for interpretive design.

» **4.0 Strategies for Interpretive Renewal**

Features a list of objectives and strategies for interpretive renewal in the Heritage Division.

» **5.0 General Recommendations**

Describes general recommendations to set the Interpretive Master Plan in motion and build momentum, including prioritized strategies and actions to propel renewal efforts.

» **6.0 Defining Nova Scotia's Stories**

Organizes Nova Scotia's stories into interpretive themes, a Content Framework, and a Content Distribution Matrix, the latter of which distributes the stories through the Nova Scotia Museum sites and identifies possible partners.

» **7.0 Conclusion:**

**How the Parts Work Together**

Describes how the Interpretive Master Plan, and its parts, are to be used either independently or in unison by the Museum, the IMP team, or an individual site.

## 1.2 Provincial Significance and Interpretation

A key task of the Interpretive Master Plan is to define Nova Scotia's provincially significant stories. In the context of heritage resources, "provincial significance" refers to that eclectic mix of landscapes, sites, specimens, objects, documents, popular culture, and folklore that, together, speak to the uniqueness of Nova Scotia. Collectively, these resources define that intangible and sometimes elusive thing called "a sense of place."

Over time, a consensus has developed through common sense, community desire and informed professional leadership that identifies resources meeting the test of provincial significance. The Heritage Division ensures that the collection of provincially significant resources, and the stories they communicate, are preserved and interpreted to serve and attract future audiences.



Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage



Sarah McGill

Not all of the provincially significant heritage resources are managed by the Province, and there is no need for them to be. However, the final report of the Volunteer Heritage Strategy Task Force, *Our Heritage Future A Shared Responsibility* (2006), and the Provincial Government's response to this task force in *A Treasured Past A Precious Future* (2008), indicate that heritage will not continue to exist without planning, effort and commitment. These reports recognize that Nova Scotians must become better informed stewards of their heritage, so they will demand that their interest remains the provincial interest. With its current legislation, operations and programs, and a carefully articulated strategy, the government has recognized the importance of provincial significance with respect to the preservation of heritage resources.

Preservation is only part of the picture. Resources are not preserved as ends in themselves, but because they have meaning. Making meaning is the business of interpretation, a major strategy for engaging Nova Scotians in their heritage. **The key challenge of interpretation is to reveal to visitors why the province's heritage resources should be interpreted, or, why these resources matter.** This Interpretive Master Plan should engage and involve Nova Scotians, and visitors from away, in the province's heritage, to ensure an involved constituency for the future.

In order to engage and attract visitors to Nova Scotia's heritage sites and resources, interpretation must enrich visitor experiences in meaningful ways. Interpretation is not merely the pouring of information into the visitor's mind, as if it were an empty vessel. While sharing information is important and necessary, effective interpretation must move beyond this to create meaning for visitors, so that they can connect an object or a site with their own personal perspectives in ways that are more profound and enduring. Interpretation is, indeed, "meaning making" and when a visitor to an historic site, a nature trail, or a museum exhibit is able to extract meaning from that experience, the experience has the potential to become memorable, transform their behaviour and/or trigger an emotional response.



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Over 50 years ago, Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957) set out the key goals of interpretation, and they remain as valid today as they were then. Three of his expectations are particularly important: interpretation should **relate**, **provoke** and **reveal**.

- » **Relate** means using clear communication principles, getting attention, making the communication enjoyable, seeking ways to make it relevant to the audience, and giving it a structure that flows logically.
- » **Provoke** means using information to suggest that visitors look at a subject in a completely new way, perhaps sometimes raising uncomfortable or controversial ideas.
- » **Reveal** encourages the presentation of information that provides new insights into why something is special; if a visitor leaves a site thinking, "I never realized that" or "Now I understand," they have experienced good interpretation.

Recently, there have been major shifts in the way we access information and communicate with each other. We have radically different ways of obtaining instant information – easy access to information on the Internet, instant messaging, emails and text messages, to name a few. Therefore, heritage interpretation must offer visitors something that is beyond the simple communication of information – it must enrich visitors' lives with meaningful experiences that engage them with the information and stories. To respond to these challenges, this Interpretive Master Plan presents strategies for re-thinking the way that interpretation is presented in the Heritage Division.

Heritage interpretation must be responsive to the visitor market, and their wants and needs. This is crucial if Nova Scotians will be encouraged to become more informed about their heritage, and therefore more effective advocates. Good interpretation makes good business, as well as educational, sense. Effectively developed interpretation programs will pay enormous dividends, and help to build a body of public support for the preservation and presentation of heritage.

## 1.3 Project Background

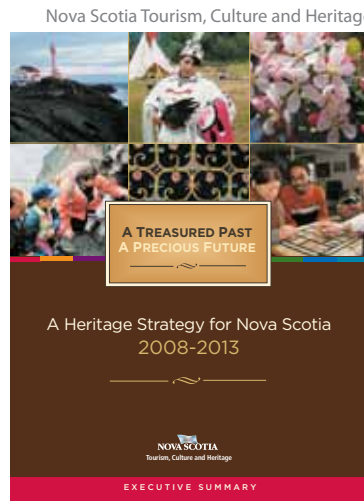
### COMBINING THE STRATEGIES

In May 2008, the Government of Nova Scotia released *A Treasured Past, A Precious Future: A Heritage Strategy for Nova Scotia 2008-2013*. This provided a framework of guidance to decision makers and outlined an ambitious program of actions aimed at achieving the over-arching vision: “All Nova Scotians, today and in the future, will know, appreciate and experience the heritage that shapes our province.”

The *Heritage Strategy* quoted the definition of heritage presented in the final report of the Voluntary Planning Heritage Task Force, *Our Heritage, Our Future, A Shared Responsibility* as follows:



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“ Heritage is that which society inherits from the previous generations and deems worthy of taking special measure to preserve for future generations, including our tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage. ”

Tangible cultural heritage was deemed to include artifacts, buildings and archival records; intangible cultural heritage involves such things as folklore, language, oral history, music skills, and belief systems; and natural heritage speaks to our natural world of land, water, vegetation, air, birds, and animals.

The *Strategy* also outlined the following three directions:

- » Better co-coordinate the efforts of those who share the responsibility to preserve, protect, promote and present Nova Scotia's heritage;
- » Improve the development and sustainable management of the full range of the province's significant heritage; and
- » Increase public recognition of the value and relevance of the province's rich heritage.

Coordinating the efforts of those working within the heritage field and building capacity only makes sense if these efforts result in substantial progress with the third goal: gaining recognition by a critical mass of Nova Scotians of **the value and relevance of heritage to their personal lives and to the quality and sustainability of their communities.**

With understanding comes appreciation and, ideally, acceptance of personal responsibility for protecting heritage resources and for advocating on their behalf. In this context, a key action under the third goal is to: **enhance our capacity to develop products and programs that interpret, present and share our many heritage stories that engage people.** This in turn led to a priority initiative to:

- » Create an Interpretive Master Plan for Nova Scotia – a plan that could be used to redirect the renewal and development of interpretive programs, services and outreach activities, and to define the quality of the interpretive experience for visitors to heritage sites. With the completion of an Interpretive Master Plan it was understood that the collective heritage resources of Nova Scotia would be placed in a position to be managed and communicated in a manner that would be relevant to all Nova Scotians and visitors, and would support the mandates of diverse government departments and agencies.

The *Heritage Strategy* has therefore become the single most important document in determining the direction, goals and work of the Heritage Division over at least the next five years. The extent to which Nova Scotians become engaged with the significant stories and values inherent in their cultural and natural heritage will in large part also determine the success of the *Strategy*. What these stories and values are, and how they are to be presented through a process of interpretive renewal and capacity building, underlie the *raison d'être* for this Interpretive Master Plan for Nova Scotia.



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## INTERPRETATION WORKING GROUP

If the Heritage Strategy identified interpretive renewal as a critical need for the province's heritage resources, it was the Heritage Division's Interpretation Working Group that defined more precisely a set of underlying concerns that needed to be addressed by an Interpretive Master Plan. Of prime concern was a general lack of awareness regarding the nature and potential of effective museum interpretation, and of the resources (research, planning and delivery skills) that such interpretation required.

The group, composed of staff members in the Nova Scotia Museum (NSM/the Museum) family, had already sponsored an inventory of the nature and scope of interpretation offered at the NSM when work to develop an Interpretive Master Plan began. Undertaken by Martha Grantham and entitled *Nova Scotia Museum Interpretive Product Inventory*, it was delivered in November 2005. From it, and other insights provided by the group, a number of concerns were identified:

- » The practice of interpretation at many of the NSM sites through exhibits, guided tours, related programs, publications and websites was often dated and in need of rethinking and reinvigoration; of key importance was the need to be more inclusive in terms of ethnicity and gender, to look for ways to combine history and natural history topics, and to seek ways of nurturing stronger community connections.

Nova Scotia Museum



- » There is no clear outline of significant subjects of Nova Scotia's cultural history, comparable to that developed for its natural history in the two volume *The Natural History of Nova Scotia*, which could hinder renewal efforts. Such an outline could provide the Heritage Division with strategic direction towards more consistent, site-appropriate and relevant interpretation.
- » There was a lack of resources (human and monetary) for investment in interpretive development.
- » There was a need to address issues of recruitment and training of interpreters.
- » There was a need to articulate interpretation standards and values.
- » There was a need to address the fact that current market research continues to reveal that museum audiences' interests and requirements have been changing dramatically over the past few decades, but that the presentation and interpretation of most of the NSM sites has changed little in either style or content.

These concerns fed into the discussions that surrounded the development of the *Heritage Strategy* and its identification of the need for an Interpretive Master Plan to help address these and other related issues.



## RENEWAL PROJECTS UNDERWAY

While the Interpretive Master Plan has been in development, the Heritage Division has moved forward with ongoing renewal efforts. **These projects reflect the positive and proactive atmosphere for change at the NSM, and in the Division in general.** Current renewal projects reflect the goals, objectives and strategies outlined later in this Interpretive Master Plan. The following projects are either completed or underway:

### Firefighters' Museum of Nova Scotia

Renewal efforts are underway at the Firefighters' Museum to develop a preliminary concept for new core exhibits. A traditional, chronological approach will be replaced with a thematic exhibit lending itself to diverse programming possibilities. As well, emphasis will be placed on the human story of firefighting and its impact on firefighters, their families, and fire victims.



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### Fundy Geological Museum

The NSM is in the initial stages of developing a concept for a new core exhibit that specifically targets families. There are also plans to incorporate Mi'kmaq creation stories that are integral to the cultural landscape of the area. Another key focus will be to use the exhibit as an information hub to send visitors out onto the landscape to experience real geological evidence.

### Perkins House Museum

The Perkins House project is near completion. It will significantly enhance the existing site interpretation by providing a more inclusive perspective of life in early 19th century Liverpool. The audio-visual projections of several individuals will help expand the site stories beyond Simeon Perkins to include vignettes delivered by Simeon's wife, his children and a black indentured servant who worked in the house. All the characters are based on writings found in Simeon's diary.

### North Hills Museum

A new storyline is being developed for North Hills Museum about Robert Patterson. It will elaborate on Patterson's contribution to heritage preservation as founder of the Historic Restoration Society and, on a broader basis, the story of a come-from-away in small town Nova Scotia. The new storyline will also develop the site's Acadian story (it was an original Acadian land grant) and interpret the cultural landscape of North Hills through the centuries.

### McCulloch House Museum

A new exhibit at McCulloch House provides a fresh take on historic house interpretation and a new way of thinking about the Scottish contribution to this province. The exhibit places the story of Thomas McCulloch in a broader context: Scottish immigration to Nova Scotia. The story also examines the breadth of the Scottish contribution to Nova Scotia through McCulloch's work. It does not shy away from talking about the numerous struggles with the church, the government and the citizens opposed to McCulloch's ideas.



## Balmoral Grist Mill Museum/ Sutherland Steam Mill Museum

The Site Manager at Balmoral Grist Mill Museum/Sutherland Steam Mill Museum has been working on interpretive renewal specifically through the development of new program partners that can broaden the basis of support in the community (local and regional). New programs are mostly related to the site's interpretive mandate. Examples include:

- » Literary Festival for some prominent heritage authors of Nova Scotia (corporate sponsor: Hudson Bay Company)
- » Woodsman competition at SSM (partner: NS Agricultural College)
- » Showcase of antique tools (partner: Antique Tool Collectors Association)
- » Fine dining at Balmoral Grist Mill - mill used as a venue for an evening dinner (partnered with local caterer). This event was very successful, especially in attracting an affluent local audience seeking a different type of experience at a familiar community venue.

Darrell Burke (2 images)



## Birchtown

Heritage Division staff are providing ongoing advice and support to the Black Loyalist Heritage Society's efforts to develop the Birchtown site. Specifically, site development will include new infrastructure (an interpretive centre) and an interpretive plan. When completed, the Birchtown site will raise awareness of an under-represented Nova Scotian story.

## Museum of Natural History

Plans for developing programming space and expanding the Nature Centre at the Museum of Natural History have morphed into an ambitious and exciting project called *Netukulimk*. This new, interactive learning space will introduce Nova Scotia's forests through the principle of "two-eyed seeing." Both indigenous and western science will be presented in interpretive exhibits and programs that illustrate human interactions and links with the natural world. The Mi'kmaq concept of *Netukulimk* incorporates the past, present, and future, and reinforces our responsibility to use resources in a sustainable manner. The central icon will be a large tree, surrounded by interactive exhibit modules; mounted, live and model plants and animals; programming space; and an open work area for staff. The first phase of the project is scheduled to open in the spring of 2010.



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## 1.4 Project Goals

The following project goals were set out in the project terms of reference and provided to the consultant team. They reflect the Heritage Strategy and the Request for Proposals to undertake the work. Project direction and requirements were also discussed with the Project Advisory Committee over the course of the project and interviews with department staff.

**Goal 1.** Identify the broad themes and stories that encompass Nova Scotia's natural and cultural heritage.

Objectives:

- » Define what is 'provincially significant'; what the Heritage Division, and the NSM within it, is responsible for preserving and interpreting.
- » Create a Content Framework within which the significant topics and sub-topics can be presented — a challenging framework that demands that the NSM look at natural history and human history in a much broader way, with recent scholarship in mind; identify key linkages between the stories; encourage inclusiveness and welcome, not avoid, controversy.

**Goal 2.** Develop an overall approach to heritage interpretation that takes into account both federal and provincial heritage sites and associated resources and, through analysis, identifies those significant themes and related content that should be told by the Nova Scotia Museum system and related Heritage Division programs.

Objectives:

- » Identify the contribution of other heritage organizations within the province in order to map out what topics are being told and by whom.
- » Identify gaps in interpretation in the province that should be developed by the Heritage Division.

**Goal 3.** Develop a plan to implement interpretive renewal across the Nova Scotia Museum, including strategies and prioritized actions, which will raise the scope and quality of interpretation.

Objectives:

- » Make recommendations for interpretive renewal so as to address the main themes and topics of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history that have been identified in the Content Framework.

- » Ensure that the collective heritage resources of Nova Scotia are managed and their stories communicated in a manner that is relevant to visitors.
- » Be a catalyst for rethinking the NSM, the relationships between its sites and their collective potential for delivering the major themes and topics of the province through interpretation.
- » Provide guidelines for interpretive standards across the system.
- » By outlining the NSM's opportunities to interpret the significant themes and topics of the province's natural and cultural history, identify implications for the future of the provincial collection, the focus of research, and how and where the collection might be used most effectively.
- » Provide clear goals, with related objectives, and strategies/actions for implementation.

**Goal 4.** Conduct market research analysis to ensure linkage to the strategies developed in the interpretive plan.

Objective:

- » Profile and define target audiences, and evaluate potential for sustainability and growth of the NSM.

# 1.5 Methodology

This report is the result of months of research, interviews, site visits, workshops, meetings, and small, focused discussions. A draft report has been circulated for comment and this final version is a result of this feedback.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TASK

The project team began the process by meeting with key Heritage Division staff as a group and individually (42 in total) to gain a greater understanding of the expectations and goals of the project. We asked them questions about their particular sites/departments and gained a general “lay of the land” for the state of interpretation in the Heritage Division.

## OUTSIDE EXPERTS

In addition to consulting with Heritage Division staff, the consultant team interviewed many other individuals who have an interest in, a knowledge of, and also interact with the products of the Heritage Division, including prominent academics, past employees of the NSM, and those involved in interpretation at Nova Scotia’s other cultural and natural history institutions, such as Parks Canada and community museums (26 interviews in total).

## COMPARABLES

The team conducted research on a number of comparable heritage systems around the world, including:

- » Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC. : Research included web research and a review of several reports.
- » National Trust of Scotland: A representative from Commonwealth Historic Resource Management travelled to Scotland and conducted first hand research, including web research, a review of annual reports and related publications, a visit to the Culloden Battlefield historic site, and an interview with Caroline Tempest, Senior Interpretive Planner. In addition, interviews were conducted with Emma Carver of English Heritage and James Carter, an Interpretation Consultant who authored an interpretive plan for Scotland, titled *A Sense of Place*.
- » Alberta Museum System: This research included a web review, review of documentation, and a telephone interview with Catherine Whalley, director of the Historic Sites and Museums Branch.
- » Australia: This research included web research of the West Australia Museum, Queensland Museum, and Museum Victoria.

Reports on these organizations can be found in the *Nova Scotia Interpretive Master Plan – Progress Report, April 2008*. Research into these comparable heritage systems provided the team with insight into how other jurisdictions manage their museum systems, particularly those with multiple sites. In doing so, the team learned that the Nova Scotia Museum is quite unique, but faces some of the same challenges as these comparable systems. Comparable research also taught the project team how other heritage systems approach and organize themes. Their thematic structures informed the development of a thematic framework for the NSM with the potential to become quite unique.

## CONTENT RESEARCH

The consultant team undertook content research to develop a clear understanding of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history, which could then assist in identifying the major themes and topics of Nova Scotia. As a comprehensive study of all available references was not possible, work focused on the key concepts and events of Nova Scotia's natural and cultural history. This included surveying the major natural and cultural history books written on the province, as well as discussion and interviews with experts: historians, educators, NSM staff, and others employed in the province's heritage sector.

Subject expert questionnaires were issued to 48 individuals with knowledge of the natural and cultural history of the province. Twenty-one responses were received from representatives from all of Nova Scotia's universities (as well as experts at universities across Canada and as far away as Scotland), cultural organizations such as the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, as well as the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Environment and Labour, the Association of Professional Geoscientists, the Geological Survey of Canada (BIO), and Parks Canada.

Content has also been reviewed and expanded regularly by content experts throughout the planning process.

## BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH

In order to attract and be relevant to current audiences, heritage sites face new challenges. The team researched trends in delivering heritage experiences to ensure that interpretive renewal in the Heritage Division will be able to respond to changing audience expectations.

## MARKET RESEARCH

In order to address and remain relevant to visitors, interpretation must be audience driven. This report includes an analysis of the current audiences for heritage in Nova Scotia and identifies future market trends. This market-driven approach has informed the interpretive renewal strategies set out in Section Four of this document.

## SITE TOURS

In order to fully understand the current situation of heritage interpretation in Nova Scotia and make informed recommendations, the team visited each of the NSM sites, as well as key heritage sites outside the system where possible. Most sites were visited in July 2008 in order to experience them during peak visitation.



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## WORKSHOPS

This process included a number of workshops and smaller, focused discussions designed to gain creative input and feedback from experts, Division staff and other interested parties at key milestones in the project. Workshops included:

- » Themes and Stories Workshop: May 21, 2008 (26 participants from the Heritage Division and outside experts)
- » Sites, Themes and Stories Workshop: May 23, 2008 (20 participants from various NSM sites and the Interpretive Working Group)
- » Interpretive Renewal & Visitors Experiences Workshop: July 22 & 24, 2008 (23 participants including NSM staff, former staff and outside organizations with interest in interpretation in Nova Scotia)



- » Action Planning Workshop: November 19, 2008 (11 participants, including key NSM staff and representatives from the Nova Scotia Environment Protected Areas Branch and the NS Historic Places Initiative)

The project team also held several internal discussions over the course of the project. In order to review and vet the Content Framework, content experts (including curators, historians and managers) were invited to two of these discussions:

- » Thematic Framework Review Session: July 21, 2008 (10 participants including NSM staff and outside experts)
- » Content Gap Review Workshop: November 18 & 20, 2008 (5 content experts)



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## PRESENTATIONS AND FEEDBACK

Throughout the process of the project, the team communicated regularly with key members of the NSM management team at key stages of the Plan's development to confirm direction and progress. Presentations and feedback have helped refine the organization and language of the Master Plan.

This Interpretive Master Plan has benefited from the expertise of all of those who gave their time to join workshops and discussions. Their passion, commitment and insight have been invaluable to the formation of the Plan, and will be essential to its future success.