021

President’s Residence

University of Saskatchewan Heritage Register

November - 2013
1. Statement of Significance

The President’s Residence has significant heritage value due to its age, use, cultural associations, architectural quality and state of preservation. The President’s Residence was built to provide a home for the first President of the University of Saskatchewan and his successors. The first President, Walter Murray, lived in the house from the time of its completion until the end of his tenure in 1937. The building’s association with Murray is of historical significance. The use of the building as a residence has been historically continuous. The home has also been host to several notable events, including a visit by Queen Elizabeth II in 2005.
The architecture of the President’s Residence is consistent, in terms of style and materiality, with other historic places on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Its craftsmanship is of exemplary quality. The building was originally to cost $32,000, but the final total came to $44,615. The cost of the house is significant: at the time the house was worth more than double that of any other home in Saskatoon. President Murray was embarrassed by the extravagance, but his requests to reduce the cost went unanswered.

Note: The President’s Residence is configured with floors numbered Basement, Ground Floor, Second Floor & Attic. This report follows the same convention.

2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The President’s Residence is primarily constructed of the rough-faced dolomitic limestone commonly known as ‘greystone’, and familiar to much of the campus. The material is significant as it was gathered from the Saskatchewan prairie near the site of the university. Surrounds and other cut stone details are rendered in Indiana limestone (Figure 1). (For further information on building stones used at the U of S, refer to Appendix: Stone.) Slate tiles clad the roof, and at the eaves, exposed wooden rafter ends are visible. Copper eaves troughs and downspouts carry water from the roof to the ground. Figure 3 shows the detailing of the eaves.

Figure 2. The President’s Residence, 1918. Photo A-711, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 3. Copper eaves troughs and exposed wooden rafter ends.
A greystone fence encloses a garden on the east side of the Residence. A wooden balustrade sits atop the fence which is entered through a wooden gate. The wooden portion of the fence remains only on the northern portion of the enclosure. To the east of the fence is the greystone garage. The original garage was removed and a new one constructed in 2010. Stone from the original garage was re-used in the construction of its replacement, as was the copper crown atop its roof. A wood-clad addition to the east side of the house was constructed in 1989 in order to expand the kitchen.

The interior finishes and materials of the home have significant heritage value. Doors are crafted from quarter sawn oak as are cabinetry, seating, picture and crown moldings. In the attic the doors have been refinished with paint. Many of the glass cabinet doors and exterior windows feature leaded glass. Interior window frames, door surrounds, hearth mantles and baseboards are also made of quarter-sawn oak. Brass fixtures adorn doors and windows. Figure 4 shows the combination of oak, bronze and leaded glass used for windows.

A central staircase climbing from the basement to the ground floor, and also constructed of quarter sawn oak, is a significant character-defining element (Figure 5). Fireplace hearths are made from glazed tile set flush with the surrounding floors in varying buff and yellow colors. As shown in Figure 6, some of the hearths still retain their cast iron grates. Controls for the flue dampers are in bronze. All mantles are wooden except for the basement fireplace shown in Figure 7 which is made of granite. Brass hardware is also used on all windows and doors in the house. The brass materials are in an excellent state of commemorative integrity and contribute to the heritage value of the house.

The walls are clad in painted plaster. According to a common practice for this age of building, the plaster was mixed with horse hair in order to achieve a stronger material. The ground floor has maintained its original wooden flooring while the first floor and a portion of the basement have received new wooden flooring. In many cases a new hardwood floor has been installed. This is discernible at points where the glazed tile mantle sits below the level of the floor. The original flooring material likely exists underneath.
The pantry adjacent to the kitchen is unique in that its wooden cabinets and trim differ from those in the rest of the house. The pantry cabinets and door surrounds are made out of stained maple (Figure 8). The location of the wood suggests that the house was designed with different materials according to the purpose of the space. The pantry was intended chiefly for use by servants and so maple may have been used instead of oak because service rooms were not intended for public view. This interpretation is reinforced by the hardware on the cabinetry. Brass hardware is found throughout the residence on all windows and doors; however the style of hardware in the pantry is more utilitarian, implying a lower importance. The pantry also features a washboard countertop. The wood of the countertop is a lightly stained oak into which an arrow pattern has been carved, for drainage (Figure 9). A wooden insert has been installed where a sink used to be. The wood and brass in the residence exist in an excellent state of commemorative integrity.

In 2012, the ground floor kitchen underwent a renovation which saw it returned to a material palette reflective of its original design. Quarter sawn oak cabinetry with glass doors was installed. The kitchen and nearby sunroom doors were replaced with oak counterparts. These renovations did not preserve original materials, but replaced contemporary materials with more historically appropriate ones. (See Section 2.3 Style).

**2.2 Form**

Organized around a central hallway, the President’s Residence is compact in form. The building reaches three stories in height above the ground. As a house, the scale of the President’s Residence is smaller from most buildings on campus. However, without any other nearby structures to relate to, the President’s Residence seems imposing. Its relatively small footprint and great height serve to enhance this effect. The Residence is designed to create a focus for its prominent river front site as shown in Figure 10. Many other early campus buildings were designed to form and enclose outdoor courtyards. The President’s Residence is not shaped to frame any outdoor space. Rather, it creates a focal point of the land on which it sits.
The form of the President’s Residence has been amended over the years with numerous renovations. However, no deletions have been made to the original form, which is still discernible and in good commemorative integrity. The most extensive change has been to the building’s east façade which has been extended to form a larger kitchen and an enclosed sun porch.

2.3 Style

The President’s Residence is in the Arts and Crafts style with elements of the Collegiate Gothic. The Arts & Crafts was a primarily domestic style of architecture of the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, that along with the Collegiate Gothic, formed part of the broader Victorian Gothic revival. The Arts & Crafts movement favoured traditional forms of craftsmanship, simple forms, manual production techniques and decorative motifs recalling mediaeval art. This style shares many characteristics with the Collegiate Gothic used elsewhere at the university, and the President’s Residence blends elements of both styles.

The President’s Residence has numerous Arts & Crafts character-defining elements, including pitched roofs with gable ends, bay and dormer windows, and various stone details. The slate tile material used to clad the roof is an element defining the character of the building. Punctuating the roofline are dormer windows. Both character-defining elements are shown in Figure 11. Oriel windows and bay windows animate the elevations (Figure 12). The small, archery style window above it is also characteristic of the gothic style. Above one bay window, a walkout balcony on the first floor is accessed through an arched doorway which contributes to the Gothic character of the building. (See Figure 13). Arches can also be seen framing one of the covered balconies. The
stonework of the exterior walls features quoins, buttresses and various other character-defining elements. The decoration applied to such utilitarian features as downspouts and chimneys, shown in Figures 14 and 15 respectively, are also elements of the Gothic Revival styles. Corbels such as those shown in Figure 14 are also used on some of the fireplaces.

The arch and vault are architectural elements characteristic of Gothic Revival styles. The ground floor corridor of this building has a vaulted ceiling as shown in Figure 16. The entrance facing the staircase on the ground floor corridor is framed by a small arch intersecting the vaulted ceiling of the ground floor corridor (Figure 17). Some fireplaces also feature arched mantles, as shown in Figure 18.

Due to its use, the President’s Residence features numerous Arts and Crafts elements which serve to define its residential character. Many of the glass doors and windows feature character-defining leaded glazing with multiple small lites. This character-defining glazing is also found on interior cabinetry as shown in Figure 19. Doors with a glazed panel across their top third are particularly characteristic of the Arts & Crafts style (Figure 20). The motif cut into the wooden staircase is another characteristically Arts & Crafts element as is the row of three tall, narrow windows shown in Figure 21. Many of the windows of the building are operated by espagnolette bolts. These fittings (pictured previously in Figure 4) are character-defining elements.
In 2012, the kitchen was renovated with new oak cabinetry matching the details of the original maple pantry cabinets. Cabinet pulls were replicated from the pantry. Crown and door moldings were copied from elsewhere in the house. Figure 22 illustrates the quarter sawn oak cabinetry detailed in the Arts & Crafts style.

Other renovations to the President’s Residence have been carried out in a modern idiom. The most salient example is on the east façade, shown in Figure 23. A sun porch enclosed in wood is distinctly modern in comparison to its traditional backdrop. Other examples of this are seen in the enclosure of porches on the north and west sides with modern glazing systems. The 2012 renovations saw some of the doors on the east side replaced with more historically sympathetic counterparts.

Figure 20. Arts and crafts style doors.
Figure 21. Light shining through an Arts and Crafts style window.
Figure 22. Arts and Crafts style cabinetry.
Figure 23. Additions made to the east side of the residence.
Figure 24. This view, ca. 1913, shows the President’s Residence in the final stages of construction and gives an overall impression of the stylistic elements of the exterior of the residence. Photo A-707, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/
2.4 Location

The President’s Residence was located generally in accordance with the 1909 campus plan, as shown in Figure 25. Situated on a point on the east bank of the Saskatchewan River, the residence has one of the most prominent locations in the city. The visibility of the residence from across the river is a character-defining element of its location that announces the university’s presence to the rest of the city.

2.5 Spatial Configuration

With a floor area of over 10,000 square feet, the President’s Residence constitutes a large home, especially by the standards of its time. The building consists of a basement, and three above ground, including an attic. The two principle stories above ground are both arranged around a central corridor. The corridor on the main floor does not have any windows; however, spaces adjacent to it such as the stairwell and entry bring in natural light (Figure 21).

Originally, the layout of the ground floor was very parceled, with numerous partition walls defining separate rooms. Figure 26 shows the ground floor as it originally existed. This has been well maintained with a few exceptions; the front porch has been enclosed to create an entrance hall and the library and reception room have been combined. The result is a much larger and more open space.
On the east side of the home, the interior of the house has been expanded by the addition of a sunroom and an addition to the kitchen. With these renovations, the original spatial configurations have been altered. For example, an access to the basement from outdoors used to be located at the bottom of an exterior set of stairs. This set of stairs is now enclosed.

The second floor of the residence was even more subdivided than the ground floor. The original floor plan is provided in Figure 27. Every room was separate with a single entrance. Like the ground floor, all of these separate rooms were organized around a hallway. Natural light was brought into the corridor by virtue of the glazing shown in Figure 21, and by dormer windows adjacent to the hall. Several window seats exist on the second floor, and are character-defining elements (Figure 28).

Figure 27 illustrates the second floor plan of the President's Residence as it was originally conceived. The second floor has undergone some changes in configuration. A balcony on the south side of building has been enclosed. Figure 29 shows the enclosed balcony as it appears from outside. The bathroom adjacent to the balcony has been renovated into a kitchenette. The linen closet directly off the main corridor has been enlarged and converted into a washroom. The south west bedroom has had closets installed. Figure 30 provides a plan of the first floor with the renovated kitchenette included.
The President’s Residence features a number of balconies that are character-defining elements of its spatial configuration. A small walkout space on top of a bay window is shown near the bottom right corner of Figure 27, and from the exterior in Figure 13.

The attic floor comprises much less living space than the other floors. Most of its area forms a large open storage space. The upstairs living quarters are on the east side. The two bedrooms and washroom on this level are much smaller than those on the second floor. The configuration of these rooms is original to the building.

This house has seven fireplaces, all of which have been maintained. Although they don’t function as they once did to provide heat, they still serve as interior focal points. Their locations, materials and form have been very well maintained and retain their commemorative integrity. The fireplace on the ground floor off the Drawing Room carries particular significance with respect to spatial configuration. Oak seating is built around this fireplace to form an inglenook. Figure 31 shows this configuration in plan.
This house features two staircases; one was intended as a service stair to be used only by the house staff. This stairwell provides the only point of access to the attic. The attic was therefore likely intended to serve as servant’s quarters. A much wider and grander staircase shown in Figure 32 was intended to accommodate the President’s family and their guests. This staircase features a two storey window that allows for an abundance of natural light to enter the ground level, basement and first floor.

### 2.6 Systems

Load-bearing exterior stone walls, supplemented by an interior wooden post and beam system, form the structure of this house. Stone foundation walls sit on concrete footings. The exterior walls of the house thicken visibly towards their base, expressing their function as structural elements. This is also visible in the thickness of the basement walls in comparison to the walls of the stories above. The interior walls of the basement are made of brick, and some are load-bearing. Stone buttresses on the corners of the exterior walls are decorative rather that structural. The wooden post and beam system is especially visible in the basement, where the posts meet beams in the ceiling to support the weight of the upper stories.

### 2.8 Use(s)

The President’s Residence has had its historical use preserved to the present day. It is also often used to host events and receptions. Historically, Walter and Christina Murray used to hold an annual Christmas Party for the faculty and staff. More recently, the residence was host to the Queen on her 2005 visit.

With the building’s use as a residence and a venue for receptions, the house serves two purposes. Its hospitality function has always been carried out on the ground floor of the house. Figure 34 shows an early example of the house being used for entertainment. The upper floors also maintain their use as personal living quarters.

Interesting to note is that the attic was designed for use by servants. Although the servants’ quarters were built into the house, no record of live-in servants exists, so it appears that the attic space never served this purpose. From 1975 to 1980 the President’s Residence attic floor was used to house students. Two students shared the larger of the two bedrooms and used the smaller of the rooms for a lounge and study space.

### 2.8 Cultural & Chronological Associations

The President’s Residence was home to the university’s first President, Walter Murray, and carries with it this association. The drawings prepared by Brown and Vallance Architects label the building ‘Residence for Dr. Murray’.
3. Associated Objects

A grandfather clock stands at the east end of the ground floor corridor (Figure 35). The clock was pictured in this location as early as the 1930's (Figure 34). No record of the clock's purchase by either Dr. Murray or the university exists, so it is not known whether it is original to the house.

The ground floor dining room holds the original set of china purchased by Walter Murray in 1913 and used by President Murray and his wife Christina. This Spode china can be identified by its Indian tree patterning pictured in Figure 36. A basement cabinet may also hold some heritage value in its contents. Green colored depression-era glass is characteristic of the time in which the Murray’s inhabited the house. Some of the china has no markings on its underside; usually a sign of older antique pieces.

4. Supporting Documents

Facilities Management Division (2011). Asset Record System [Data File]. Retrieved from \usask\fmddfs\files\iis\IIS_Public\ARS

University of Saskatchewan Archives. Board of Governors Agendas, University of Sask. 1911.


University of Saskatchewan Archives. Jean Murray Fonds AII1(b) Finances.

University of Saskatchewan Archives. Jean Murray Fonds EIIC32 President’s Residence.


Figure 34. Visible at the far end of the corridor is a grandfather clock. Photo A-5507, retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/

Figure 35. The clock still stands at the east end of the ground floor corridor.
5. **Summary of Character - Defining Elements**

**Materials**
- greystone walls
- indiana limestone ornamentation
- slate tile roofing
- quarter sawn oak doors, baseboards, moldings, cabinetry
- wooden floorboards
- maple pantry
- copper downspouts
- steel
- bronze and brass fixtures
- red clay terra cotta
- plaster (with horse hair)
- granite fireplace
- glazed tile hearth
- metal grates

**Form**
- large scale
- deep floor plate

**Style**
- elements associated with the Arts & Crafts style
- pitched slate roofs with gable ends
- corbels
- dormer windows
- bay windows
- oriel windows
- arches (mantles, entries, doors, windows)
- vaults (corridor)

**Location**
- according to 1909 campus plan
- visibility and prominence on riverbank
Spatial Configuration

- arrangement around central corridors
- natural light from glazing in circulation spaces
- parcelled interior
- outdoor spaces (porches, galleys)
- heated bathroom floor
- hearths (with built in oak seating)
- stairwells (service stair and guest stair)
- window seats

Systems

- piers

Use(s)

- residential on second and third floor
- entertaining on main floor

Cultural & Chronological Associations

- Dr. Walter Murray