

Definitions

Heritage activity in the 21st century is a sophisticated endeavour, often accompanied with technical words and terms with very specific meanings.

The Gimli Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee has developed the following definitions and brief explanations that will help anyone interested in this important work, especially as it relates to the subjects of history, research and heritage.

Academic History

Academic histories are a genre of historiography emphasizing scholarly analysis and interpretation intended primarily for a university audience. These histories are undertaken by academics, usually university or college professors.

Assessment

Assessment is the review of information through the use of standard and judicious criteria to determine whether a theme, subject, issue, individual or group has greater importance when compared to others with a similar claim.

Commemoration

Commemoration involves the selection of a historic subject (person, place, theme, event, etc.) via a rigorous assessment process and then the consideration of appropriate methods and venues to honour and promote that subject. Typical methods for such work include plaques, statues and murals. When the commemorative approach is a plaque it is essential that wording be concise and exact, that key issues be carefully weighed and addressed, and that texts be appropriate and clear.

Conservation

Architectural conservation refers to the processes by which the physical integrity of a site, and thus its ability to tell its story, is maintained and prolonged.

Canada recognizes a range of treatments that fall under the umbrella of conservation:

- **Preservation** is aimed at maintaining as much extant historic material as possible, recognizing that buildings undergo alterations and additions through time and that these changes are important parts of its history.
- **Rehabilitation** is considered to be appropriate for buildings that may have experienced more deterioration. While an emphasis remains on the maintenance of historic materials, there is more flexibility about alterations and modernization. Rehabilitation may be applied to a building chosen for adaptive reuse, a process in which the heritage character of the site is retained to the extent possible while it is completely altered for another purpose (e.g. a church becoming an apartment house, or a fire hall reused as a restaurant).

- **Restoration** is generally reserved for particularly important sites, and emphasizes the most significant moment in the building's history (which may be the time of its construction, or perhaps when an important person lived there), retaining and even reconstructing features dating from that moment and removing later additions. In every case, the building's character-defining elements are central to the conservation.

Designation

Designation is the legal recognition that a site is significant to the community and that its owner has agreed to protect it and preserve its heritage character.

Designation is usually the last step in a process that has ensured that a site has major heritage value, that the community recognizes this value, and that the building or site has been deemed sustainable through an examination of financial and technical issues. Very few buildings or sites merit designation, and great care is usually taken to determine whether this option is necessary for the protection or promotion of a site.

Heritage Management/Planning

Heritage is a major factor in establishing the unique identity of any community. As such, it is of importance not just to those who appreciate the aesthetic qualities of older buildings or who want to connect younger generations to their history, but also to the economy.

Good heritage management seeks to preserve and make the most of the community's best heritage assets, and should play an important role in urban and regional planning by ensuring that development is carried out with reference to heritage character.

A values-based management approach ensures that decisions and actions directed at a heritage site or area will be determined in light of the key reasons for its significance.

Historic/Historical

These two words are commonly confused, and used interchangeably. Historic refers to events, themes, subjects, individuals, groups that are important or of momentous significance – they define aspects of history. Historical merely means anything that relates to the past; that is, most events, themes, subjects, individuals, groups. Only a few things are truly historic; everything else is historical.

Historiography

Historiography is the writing of history, the study of the development of historical method, historical research, and writing, and any body of historical literature.

History/Heritage

History is the study, analysis and presentation (usually via a book or article) of a subject, theme, event, person, or site in all its aspects—the good and the bad.

The traditional goal of historical exploration is to explain a subject in all its details and meaning. While heritage is based on history (and historic exploration), it is the result of choices and selections by a community or a group to identify events, people and places that are seen to most effectively sum up or express beloved and revered aspects of the past.

While an operative word for history is exploration, an operative word for heritage is celebration.

Interpretation

Interpretation involves the careful and creative expression of a chosen historical subject so that members of a community or visitors to a community can completely comprehend and appreciate its significance. Interpretation involves the consideration of audience/reader needs (for facts, information and enjoyment via engaging writing and graphic design) and of historical communication, to ensure that messages are accurate, clear and persuasive. Common interpretative venues include pamphlets, tours, articles and books.

Inventory

A heritage inventory is a planning tool that identifies all sites of potential heritage significance in a defined area, usually providing as much basic information as possible (date, architect, builder, original owner, original function etc.).

An inventory provides important information to help develop planning intended to make the most of the community's heritage assets, which is especially important in areas experiencing development pressure.

In addition, an inventory provides the basis for a range of heritage-related activities, from the development of walking tours to determining the most significant sites for further study. It also provides a record of what has been lost in the case of demolition, fire etc.

Oral History

Oral History involves the recording in audio or audio-visual form, and/or the transcribing, of eyewitness accounts of historical events. Historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, linguists, and others employ some form of interviewing in their research. Oral history is an important means by which non-academics actively participate in "making history."

Popular History

Popular history is a broad genre of historiography that aims at a wide readership, appeals to the layman and general public, and usually emphasizes narrative, personality, and vivid detail over scholarly analysis and interpretation. Some popular historians are without academic affiliation; others are academics or former academics.

Research

In the broadest sense of the word, research is the gathering of data, information and facts for the advancement of knowledge. Historical research typically involves the collection and review of data and information, in a detailed and accurate manner, in order to answer questions, resolve debates or bring clarity to an issue or subject.

Restoration

A representation or reconstruction of the original form.

Significance

The significance of a heritage subject or issue refers to its capacity to clearly and correctly connect to the people, events or ideas that shaped their time.

For a subject to be considered significant to the community, it would typically have a major connection to a notable theme or person. It is important to note that a subject or individual can be interesting without being significant.

Site/Resource/Place

Although most heritage sites in Canada are buildings, almost anything from a bridge to a mine complex to a traditional meeting-place with no built element at all may be identified as a heritage site.

The term “site” is sometimes interchangeable with the words “resource” and “place:” thus the terms heritage site, heritage resource or historic place are sometimes used interchangeably.

Stewardship

The conducting, supervising, or managing of something; *especially*: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care: *stewardship of natural resources*;

Sustainability

Sustainability is a crucial consideration in any kind of planning.

Reusing or continuing to use old buildings is an environmentally sustainable practice, as it keeps materials out of the landfills and saves the environmental cost of producing new ones.

For heritage planning purposes, sustainability also refers to the ability of a project to survive in the long term. This is dependent not only on its ongoing financial security, and, if a building, its physical state, but also on the availability of people willing and able to carry the project forward in the long term.