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The Loss of Authenticity in Restoration

As time passes, built structures and monuments show their age through patina, the organic and superficial degradation that is usually not harmful to the material. Frequently patina adds to the aesthetic heritage value, visually showing the long history and endurance of the structure. But also as time passes, decay may compromise the structural integrity. At this point in the life of the building, action must be taken. If it is too late for minimal actions, should the structure be restored back to its original glory, or left alone to deteriorate? And if restoration is chosen, how would this affect its authenticity?

Authenticity is an essential factor when considering heritage values. Authenticity has many definitions including: “The quality of being genuine or original, being actually what is claimed rather than imitative.”¹ One of the first official documents to outline heritage authenticity was the Venice Charter² in 1964 stating that “It is our duty to hand [the historic monuments] on in the full richness of their authenticity.” But when the only way to allow for the structure to be viewed by future generations is by restoration, is the structure still authentic?

Throughout history, aging buildings have been restored to preserve them for the future. But, in the absence of regulations or guidelines, the restorations compromised the authenticity or aesthetic value of the buildings. One of the early architects to perform restorations was Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. He has been frequently criticized for making alterations to ancient buildings. One of his peers compared his restoration of the church of Vézelay to the people who ransacked the

¹ “Getty Conservation Institute Glossary for Iraq Course.” *ICOMOS*. 2004
http://ip51.icomos.org/~fleblanc/documents/terminology/doc_terminology_e.html

² “International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter).” *ICOMOS International*. 1964. http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf

church and mutilated the tympanum saying “all these devastators are less guilty than Viollet-le-Duc with his restoration”.³

Many ancient structures as they are seen today have been restored multiple times throughout their history, slightly altering the appearance and reinforcing the structure for its survival. For example, when Viollet-le-Duc restored Notre-Dame in Paris he included a taller and more ornate reconstruction of the flèche (spire). This addition has now become part of the appearance and history of the iconic building. The new spire is not authentic: it was built in the late 1800s rather than during the initial construction of the church in the 13th century. Does the loss of authenticity cause a loss of heritage value?

Every heritage site possesses both tangible and intangible heritage values. For the situation of the Notre-Dame cathedral, the spire itself has its own heritage value. The spire, even though not of authentic construction, represents intangible heritage values. France had just emerged from the Napoleonic era and many of the country’s great structures were in desperate need of repair, including the Notre-Dame cathedral. The cathedral had been pillaged, many of its historic statues destroyed. On top of the devastation and destruction by the mobs, the cathedral had also been subjected to over six hundred years of decay and deterioration. The restoration was necessary for the preservation of the iconic structure. The intangible value associated with the spire is the history behind the need for the restoration, as well as the lack of guidelines around heritage conservation at the time.

Even after the Venice Charter started the conversation of authenticity, laying down the first guidelines, there was much debate due to the diversity of heritage properties and the uniqueness of each situation. The Venice Charter was later judged too rigid, indicating that the

³ Daniel D. Reiff, *Viollet le Duc and Historic Restoration: The West Portals of Notre-Dame* (New York: State University College)

authenticity of a heritage site lies only in the structure itself. The need for a more encompassing charter on the diversity of authenticity led to the creation of the Nara Document on Authenticity in 1994. The ICOMOS heritage experts who convened in Japan decided, “It is thus not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria.”⁴ When evaluating the authenticity of a building, both the tangible and intangible values must be taken into account.

This brings us to today, where the delicate balance between authenticity and preservation of heritage for the future is still being debated. Since the Nara Document of Authenticity, there have been over fifty regional and national meetings on the topic.⁵ At what point does the loss of physical authenticity become acceptable to preserve the intangible heritage values? Canada, as a relatively new country, is just starting to encounter many issues such as this. Many Canadian heritage structures are now becoming aged to the point where some form of conservation must be taken. An example of a debated restoration project in Ontario is the Donald Chemical Plant outside of Haliburton.

Built in 1908 by Westinghouse Engineering, the Donald Chemical Plant building is a unique facility which was built using many innovating technologies at the time⁶. A \$1 million budget (approximately \$26 million today) allowed the builders to attempt new construction techniques which emerged at the turn of the century⁷. The building was constructed without any welding. The whole structure is like a web of interactive parts in a dynamic tension. This means that the majority of the building is being held together by only its own weight. The concrete roof must remain heavy to provide sufficient tension to keep the beams standing, as the central beams

⁴ “The Nara Document on Authenticity.” *ICOMOS International*. 1994. <http://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>

⁵ Pamela Jerome, “An Introduction to Authenticity in Preservation.” *APT Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No.2/3 (2008).

⁶ Leora Berman, e-mail message to author, March 17, 2015.

⁷ Angelica Blenich, “Building restoration hinges on blueprints.” *Haliburton Echo*. July 15, 2014. <http://www.newspapers-online.com/haliburton/?p=5341>

in particular are freestanding. The roof is reinforced with chain which allows for a type of insurance in terms of deterioration and stress failure so that it cannot cave in entirely and it accommodates earth movements. Given the experimental nature of the construction methods, the entire structure was overbuilt/over-engineered. It is this amount of over-engineering which has allowed the structure to remain standing for 70 years after being abandoned.

All of these incredible feats of engineering add to the heritage value of the structure. Initially, many of the original settlers had moved to the region in the early 1900s to work at the chemical plant as it was a major part of Haliburton's economy.⁷ A project was initiated recently to restore the industrial building. Leora Berman is coordinating the project to return the structure back to its original condition. The plan is to convert the building into a space for local construction businesses and contractors as a showcase and to be open to the public, to be called the Eco-Innovation Centre Cooperative. She was quoted in the local Haliburton paper, "Two years of research, surveys and data shows that the repurposing of the building will benefit the economy in Haliburton and six agencies backing the project including local contractors shows the value this project holds for the community."

To date, the project has received more than \$40 000 in funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This money was used to fix the roof which had deteriorated over years without maintenance, and some work on the exterior. Although, recently the project has come to a screeching halt as the original blueprints for the building cannot be found. Since it is the unique engineering which creates much of the interest in the structure, continuing the restoration without the blueprints would compromise the authenticity. Ms. Berman was quoted: "If not found we will have to re-engineer the building, which means it will no longer be a significant heritage site."⁷

This building is remarkable in terms of the engineering, but along with many other industrial buildings in Canada it has not received heritage designation. This means that the project to restore the structure can proceed without the blueprints, as there are no regulations on non-designated buildings to prevent compromising of authenticity. Is the proper decision to sacrifice the authenticity of the building for the economic gain and for the preservation of the intangible values?

No decisions have been made as of yet in regard to the future of the building. In my opinion at this point in the process, and having not received heritage designation, the project should go forward even if some of the unique engineering elements are lost in the process. This building is a piece of the county's heritage, which has been sitting dormant since 1946. Presently Haliburton's economy is dominated by tourism⁸, and this project is a chance for the building to showcase the time when Haliburton was a county with multiple industries to current and future generations. Without the continuation of this project, the building will once again be forgotten for many years until it decays naturally.

As previously mentioned, every site is unique. Authenticity is given more importance in designated buildings and this plan of continuing restoration without sufficient evidence is not applicable to many other sites. The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada clearly articulates what to do when facing restoration challenges with designated buildings⁹. Standard 13 states: "Where character-defining elements are too severely deteriorated to repair and where sufficient physical evidence exists, replace them with new elements that match the forms, materials and detailing of sound versions of the same elements."

⁸ "Haliburton County," *Haliburton Tourism*, accessed March 30, 2015, www.haliburton-tourism.com/halcounty.chtml

⁹ *The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. (Canada: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2010), 23.

This directly relates to the Donald Chemical Plant as it is too severely deteriorate to repair and no physical evidence exists. According to this standard, if the Plant had been designated as a heritage site, an authentic restoration would not be possible and the building would be left to decay.

In 1996, two years after the creation of the Nara Document on Authenticity, members of the ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas gathered in San Antonio, Texas to discuss the meaning of authenticity in preservation in the Americas.¹⁰ At this symposium, the Declaration of San Antonio was created. As the cultural identity of the Americas are significantly different than those of other continents due to the unique development and influences, it is difficult to encompass the heritage values on the same principles as the rest of the world. There are many groups of people from around the world who have contributed to the rich multiculturalism that makes up our dynamic continental identity. The declaration describes these multicultural heritage values by stating that; “Within the cultural diversity of the Americas, groups with separate identities co-exist in the same space and time and at times across space and time, sharing cultural manifestations, but often assigning different values to them.” The document continues by listing many ways on how authenticity is related to topics such as identity, history, materials, social values, etc., in relation to the multicultural values found in the Americas.

This document is important because it was the first to address multiculturalism and how each culture has different values for historic sites. The declaration enforces how both the majority and minority groups have value in different sites and how all of these values must be

¹⁰ “The Declaration of San Antonio.” *ICOMOS National Committees of the Americas*. 1996.
<http://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/188-the-declaration-of-san-antonio>

recognized “without imposing a hierarchical predominance of any one culture and its values over those of another”.

The Declaration of San Antonio both reinforces and rejects my opinion of restoring the Donald Chemical Plant without the blueprints. In the section of Authenticity and Materials, the document emphasizes how only historic fabric is authentic, and that interpretations achieved through restoration are not. The declaration universally rejects relying upon conjecture or hypotheses for performing a restoration. Although, in this section there is also a statement which refers to the idea of intangible values outweighing the need for authentic materials:

“We recognize that in certain types of heritage sites... the conservation of the overall character and traditions may be more important than the conservation of the physical features of the site, and as such, may take precedence. Therefore, authenticity is a concept much larger than material integrity and the two concepts must not be assumed to be equivalent or consubstantial.”

With all of this contradicting evidence what should be the next step? How can all of this information be applied around Canada to heritage sites? Each document referenced gives general guidelines and overall ideas, yet each heritage site is unique and perhaps not all of the charters and declarations are applicable. With each successive document the guidelines around authenticity have become increasingly general. The Venice Charter initiated the discussion with a ‘narrow’ view and the Declaration of San Antonio was written to incorporate the multiculturalism of the Americas into the question of authenticity.

The best use for the abandoned Donald Chemical Plant is to benefit the community. Studies have shown the positive economic boost the repurposing would have for the small town. This site shows how unique a heritage property can be, and how in rare occasions it is necessary to sacrifice the authenticity of the structure for the preservation of intangible heritage values. In the future, maybe the re-engineered structure will be resemble the enlarged spire on Notre-Dame

cathedral. An alteration to the heritage structure which, although not authentic, was incorporated into its legacy. A piece of the puzzle of the entire history of the building, representing a turning point where change was necessary and hard decisions had to be made.

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