

Prince of Wales Prize for Municipal Heritage Leadership 2014 – Town of Bonavista, Newfoundland and Labrador



Photo: Loretta Lander

“O Buon Vista!” (“Oh, happy sight!”)

Located near Cape Bonavista at the end of a long peninsula on Newfoundland’s northeast coast, the Town of Bonavista (population 3,589) is one of North America’s oldest communities. It is said to be named after the first words Venetian explorer John Cabot exclaimed as he came across the cape in 1497: “O Buon Vista!”

First settled around the middle of the 17th century, Bonavista quickly became one of the province’s most important regional fishing centres with a busy downtown commercial district made up of locally-operated businesses. After the Moratorium on Northern Cod in 1992, that saw the population decline by 20 percent, the future of Bonavista—as indeed all outports—was in doubt.

With the most extensive collection of 19th-and early 20th-century buildings in the province outside of St. John’s, Bonavista looked to its heritage assets to help sustain its future. Through a partnership with the Bonavista Historic Townscape Foundation (BHTF), the Town of Bonavista began an ambitious heritage preservation and community revitalization plan to help develop new economic opportunities and improve the quality of life of its residents.

Using federal and provincial programs aimed at economic and employment adjustments in the post-Moratorium period, Bonavista launched several important heritage conservation and development initiatives. The most successful include:

- *Historic Properties Investment Program*: A cost-share grant program for exterior restoration work that benefited 40 heritage properties.
- *Historic Properties Salvage and Development Initiative*: Supported a range of rehabilitation projects including the United Church Central School, James Ryan Tenement House, Keough Shop and Garrick Theatre.
- *Streetscape Development*: Saw two ambitious improvement projects to the town centre and harbourfront area.



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- *Restoration Team:* Using employment and skills development programs, local workers impacted by the closure of the inshore cod fishery were trained in traditional wood carpentry allowing them to remain in the community and enhance their skills. The team worked on the restoration of the United Fishermen Hall, Mockbeggar Plantation Provincial Historic Site and Bonavista's Loyal Orange Lodge (believed to be the largest fraternal hall of wooden construction in North America).

The Town of Bonavista provided a high level of support in the form of an annual \$40,000 operating grant to the BHTF; salaries of museum staff and a half-time archivist; enactment of a heritage bylaw allowing municipal heritage designation of all restored properties under the *Historic Properties Investment Program*; and support for Heritage Districts to be created in the new town plan currently under development.

As one business owner stated in a letter supporting the nomination, "Bonavista has successfully steered clear of lifeless, cloying gentrification. Buildings have been repaired, renovated, restored and put to work housing families, businesses, and culture and heritage interpretation. ... This is living sustainable heritage."

Click [here](#) to read His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales' message of congratulations to the Town of Bonavista, which was read aloud by The Hon. Frank Lewis, Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island, during the National Trust's Awards Ceremony held in Charlottetown on October 3, 2014.