

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	Lunenburg Old Town
<i>Location</i>	Nova Scotia
<i>State Party</i>	Canada
<i>Date</i>	7 October 1994

**Justification by State Party**

The "Old Town" District of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, is an eminent and extremely well preserved example of 18th century British colonization and settlement patterns in North America and an excellent example of a sustained vernacular architectural tradition spanning more than 240 years.

In its clearly legible model town plans, its building forms and fabric, and its cultural evolution based on the pursuance of the shipbuilding and fishing industries, this architectural ensemble illustrates successive stages in the human history of North America. **Criterion iv**

The offshore Atlantic fishery, the centuries-long backbone of Lunenburg's economy, has evolved over time. While it may continue to evolve in the future, it is clear that it will be in a form which cannot yet be fully defined. **Criterion v**

Arguments can also be made for the realization of the Old Town model plan, the town's subsequent development within the model town framework, and the current integrity of the plan to represent a "masterpiece of human creative genius". **Criterion i**

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Lunenburg is a *group of buildings*.

**History and Description***History*

The narrow peninsula on which Lunenburg was built was first settled formally in 1753, when German, Swiss, and Montbéliardian French immigrants were brought to Nova Scotia under a British colonization plan. A rigid gridiron plan was superimposed on the slope of the steep hill rising up from the harbour. The new settlement was named Lunenburg after the Royal house of Brunswick-Lüneberg, from which the Hanoverian Kings of England were descended. The 1453 largely German-speaking Protestants who migrated to Lunenburg in 1752-53 represent the most northerly German settlement in North America in the 18th century. German customs and the German language survived an unusually long time in Lunenburg, owing to its relative isolation.

Lunenburg was the second British colonial "model" town plan, after Halifax (1749). The model town was an important aspect of imperial policy for the British, to provide the functional space thought necessary for the smooth working of a colony. The model for laying out new towns in the colonies was created by the Board of Trade and Plantations. The Lunenburg plan (1753) incorporated all the principles of the model town: geometrically regular streets and blocks; the allocation of public spaces; an allowance for fortifications; and a distinction between urban and non-urban areas. Of these all but the fortifications survive in present-day Lunenburg.

The town is home to the oldest continuous worshipping Lutheran and Presbyterian congregations in Canada, both having been founded in 1753.

During the 19th century the town developed a strong economy based on fishing and shipbuilding. These industries expanded in the 20th century. In the 1850s it sent the first fleet to the Grand Banks; in the 1870s it revolutionized the industry with the introduction of "double dory" trawl fishing; in the 1920s it was at the forefront of the development of fresh-fish processing in Canada; and today it is the base for Canada's largest fish-processing plant and fleet of deep-sea trawlers. Lunenburg was, and remains, an important centre for shipbuilding and related industries. It is one of the very few communities in North America where traditional shipbuilding skills are still to be found.

#### *Description*

The layout of the existing town preserves almost in its entirety the model layout of the mid 18th century. The plan consisted of six divisions of eight blocks each, each block being in turn subdivided into fourteen lots. Each settler was given a town lot and a larger "garden lot" (the name survives to the present day) outside the town limits. One section of the town was not divided into lots, to serve as a public parade ground. The streets perpendicular to the harbour are 48 feet (14.6 m) wide and those parallel to the harbour 40 feet (12.2 m) wide. The only exception is the central perpendicular street, King Street, which is 80 feet (24.4 m) wide.

The architectural stock of Lunenburg's Old Town is remarkably homogeneous and cohesive. Over 95% of the buildings are built in wood, many of them using the *coulisse* construction technique that is uncommon in North America. Although its architectural styles span almost the entire period of formal British settlement in Atlantic Canada, there is a compatibility of scale, siting, cladding, and architectural vocabulary (including Scottish dormers and the "Lunenburg bump," an indigenous five-sided dormer).

The founding period in the 18th century is represented by at least eight buildings of *coulisse* construction (wooden frames infilled with horizontal planks). They were built close to one another and to the streets, with the wider elevation facing the harbour. Two-thirds of the buildings of Lunenburg date from the 19th century. The earlier examples continue the 18th century tradition. However, the second half of the century saw the advent of a new prosperity, based on fishing and shipbuilding. Property owners became more adventurous in terms of style (although Lunenburg's innate conservatism prevented excesses). Most of the remaining housing stock is pre-1930 in date, with the tradition of building in wood continuing.

The pattern of construction of the residential buildings is repeated in the commercial and waterfront buildings, where wood predominates. The same applies to the churches: the second oldest protestant church building in Canada, St John's Anglican Church, begun in 1754, is considered by experts to be an example of "carpenter Gothic" at its finest. St Andrew's Presbyterian Church was built in 1828 and remodelled fifty years later.

### **Management and Protection**

#### *Legal status*

The 404 buildings in the Old Town, nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List, are in multiple (private and public) ownership. Parks, streets, and public buildings are publicly owned and accessible to visitors.

At federal level, the Old Town is designated a National Historical District; the former Lunenburg Academy (101 Kaulback Street) is designated of national architectural significance as an outstanding example of late 19th century school architecture.

Under the enabling legislation of the Heritage Property Act of Nova Scotia 1980, the Town of Lunenburg enacted a Heritage Property Byelaw (No 43) in February 1981 to establish a Heritage Advisory Committee and a register of Municipal Heritage Properties: 24 buildings have so far been so designated. In addition there are four Provincial Heritage Properties. There is at present a proposal to declare the Old Town a Heritage Conservation District (co-terminous with the National Historic District and the area proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List).

## *Management*

The responsible agency is the Municipality of the Town of Lunenburg, backed by the Department of Canadian Heritage (technical advice on request) and Public Works and Government Services Canada (federally owned buildings).

The Town of Lunenburg's *Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw* of October 1985 (revised on a regular basis) directs development within the town. It includes a section devoted to heritage conservation. The next major revision, scheduled for 1995, will address heritage conservation through an "Architectural Control" overlay. The Heritage Property Bylaw adopted by the Town Council in 1981 gives it authority to designate buildings and areas and to control any subsequent alterations to them.

Individual property owners are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of their properties. The Town of Lunenburg has produced a *Heritage Advisory Information Kit* to advise owners on appropriate conservation techniques. Heritage Advisory Committee members and town staff also provide advice on request to interested parties. The Provincial Government offers a comprehensive series of grants for all designated Heritage Properties and a series of other programmes aimed at encouraging good restoration and maintenance.

The nominated property of the Old Town is surrounded by a natural buffer zone in the form of water to the north and south and very steep slopes on the other sides, upon which development is impractical. Any potential development in these areas is further controlled by the *Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw*, which lays down stringent conditions relating to the maintenance of traditional rural land uses.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The town's administrators assess a minimum of 98% of the buildings in the Old Town as being in a much better than average or well kept condition, which is confirmed by study of the 1992 update of *The Inventory of Historic Buildings*. This reflects the increased public understanding of heritage and the unique nature of the town's buildings over the past two decades (witnessed by the foundation of the Lunenburg Heritage Society in 1972 and the Heritage Advisory Committee in 1981). However, this built on a firm foundation: as early as the 1790s a visitor characterized the Lunenburg Germans as "economists for saving." Another visitor in 1830 described the citizens in similar terms: "Every householder, from the highest to the lowest, appears to possess the means of keeping his tenement in repair and good order, a fact by no means prevalent in other places." With the coming of prosperity in the mid 19th century the conservative ethic of the Lunenburgers led to existing buildings being upgraded rather than torn down to make way for new constructions.

The result is that at the present time a number of historic buildings have been or are being restored to their original state. There is also a resurgence in the use of traditional colours and colour schemes, replacing the white that had become universal but for which there was no historical justification.

### *Authenticity*

Given the innate conservatism of the inhabitants of the town with respect to their houses, and taking account of the care being taken to restore historic houses to their original states, the level of authenticity is high on every count. The setting and layout of the town itself have changed minimally since 1753, only the defences having been demolished. Wood remains overwhelming the principal construction material and traditional techniques have been maintained when restoration has been carried out on earlier buildings.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the town in February 1995. The ICOMOS International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages was also consulted.

### *Qualities*

There can be no argument that Lunenburg is remarkably well preserved and that it retains most of the qualities of the original British model colonial settlement, without losing its status as a fully functioning community in the modern world.

### *Comparative analysis*

The Canadian authorities include in the nomination dossier a survey of what is known of the phenomenon of the model town plan in British North America in the 17th to 19th centuries, covering both the "southern tier" (the Thirteen Colonies that became the United States of America) and the northern tier, now the Canadian Provinces of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Québec, and Ontario.

In the latter group, Halifax was the first to be undertaken (1749), followed by Lunenburg four years later; these were both the work of Charles Morris and are very similar in layout. Variations followed at Charlottetown (PEI), also the work of Morris, in 1768, and Georgetown (PEI) at about the same time. Other settlements in this region, in New Brunswick, include Parr Town (now St John) in the 1780s and St Andrews and Fredericton in 1785. Further examples followed in Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake), Johnstown, and Cornwall, but these departed significantly from the earlier model. Lunenburg is the only one of these communities which did not decline (as in the case of Georgetown or the earlier plantations at Horton and Canso) or become swamped by subsequent development (as at Halifax and St John's).

In the American colonies this type of settlement is missing from New England, which characteristically eschewed formality of plan, with the exceptions of New Haven (1638) and Hartford (1640), both in Connecticut. Further south most of the new towns in Virginia and Maryland were laid out on a simple grid plan, without the refinements of the later model, following town planning statutes in 1680, 1691, and 1706. Only Charlestown (Maryland), laid out in 1740, exhibits this complexity. In the middle colonies, Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) was laid out on a regular grid in 1682-83, and this five-square grid was repeated elsewhere, notably in Raleigh (North Carolina) in 1792 and Tallahassee (Florida) in 1824. A rudimentary form of the model grid was also used at Charleston (South Carolina). The most successful application of this form of layout is that of Savannah (Georgia), laid out in 1732-33 and inspired most probably by Philadelphia. Of this important group of towns, most have expanded enormously, obscuring the original plan. The overall layout of Charleston was largely lost following disastrous fires in 1740 and again in 1778, whilst Savannah has lost its common land and garden plots (still surviving at Lunenburg) with the addition of new gridiron extensions in the 19th century.

To summarize, it may fairly be claimed that Lunenburg is the only one of over twenty British settlements in North America to retain all the elements of its original plan virtually intact, as a result of the remarkable way in which its population, vocation, and development have remained unchanged for over two centuries. As such, therefore, it is the best surviving example of this colonial settlement phenomenon.

### *ICOMOS comments*

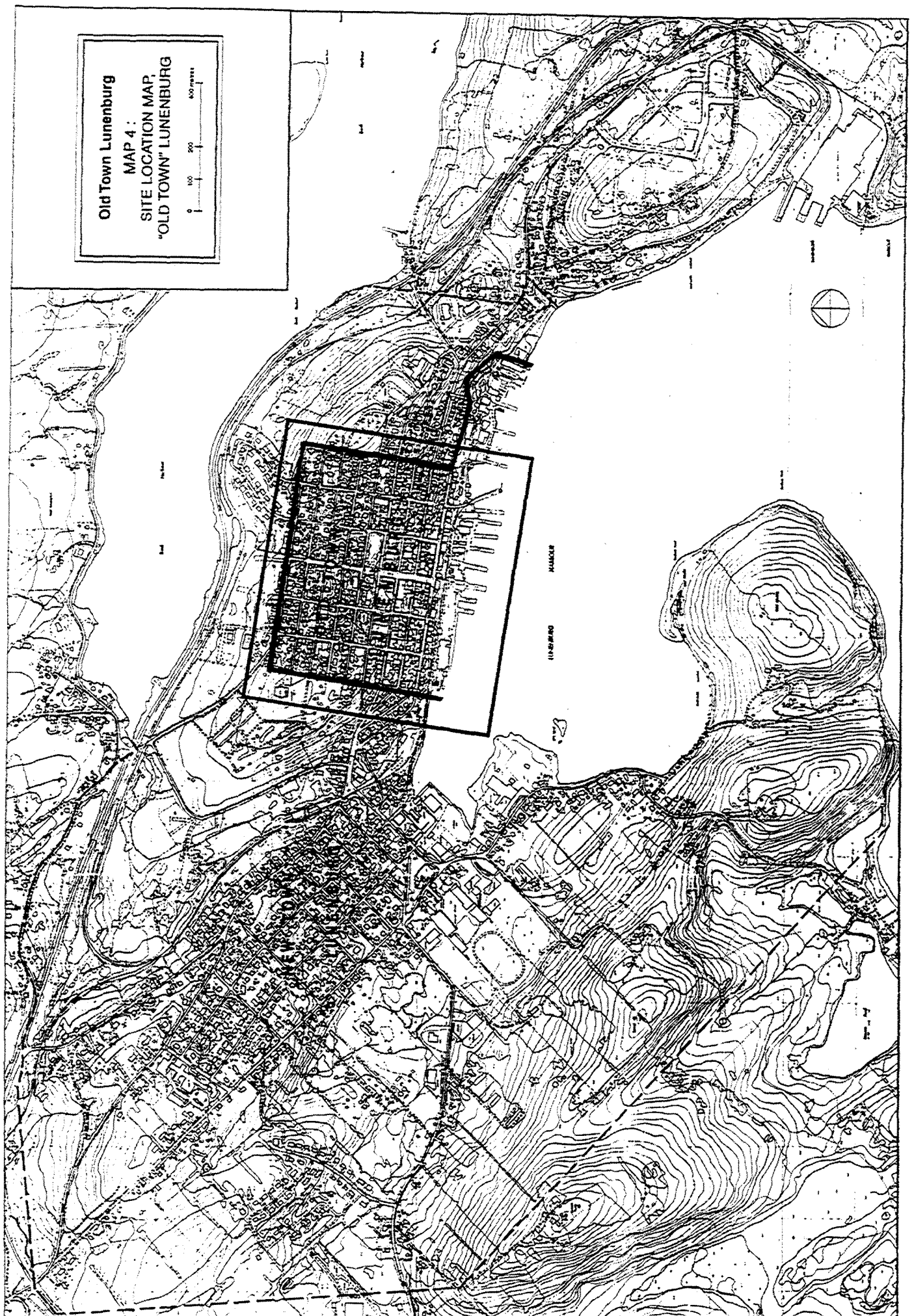
ICOMOS does not dispute the claim of Lunenburg to be the best surviving representative of British colonial town planning in North America. It is concerned, however, that a piecemeal approach has been, and is being, adopted to the phenomenon of planned European colonial settlements in other continents. A number of Spanish and Portuguese colonial towns in the New World are already inscribed on the World Heritage List (eg Cartagena, Lima, Puebla, Ouro Preto, etc). Dutch colonization is represented by Galle (Sri Lanka). There are, however, a number of other European colonial towns in Asia and the Caribbean that have not so far been nominated by the States Parties on whose territories they are situated. ICOMOS feels therefore that priority should be given as part of the Global Strategy to a comparative study of all the cultural properties of this type, perhaps supported by both the ex-colonial powers and the "host" States Parties. It is worthy of note that a seminar covering part of this field, the Dutch colonial heritage, was organized in January 1995 in Sri Lanka.

### **Recommendation**

ICOMOS recommends that consideration of this nomination be deferred for two years to await the outcome of a comparative study of European colonial planned settlements. In the event of the British component of this study

not being completed by that time, ICOMOS recommends that consideration be given to inscription of Lunenburg on the List without further delay, on the basis of criteria iv and v.

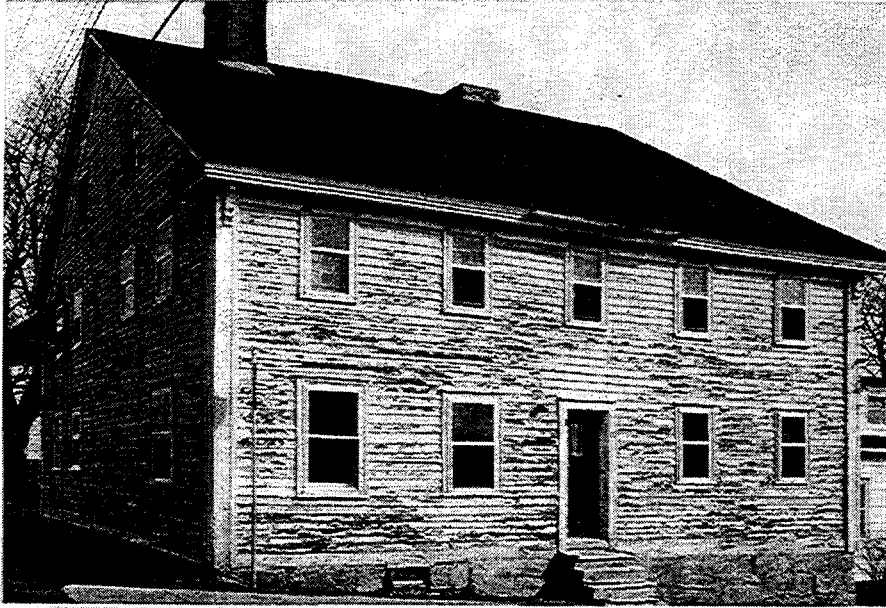
ICOMOS, September 1995



Lunenburg : carte de localisation du site /  
site location map



Lunenburg : vue aérienne de la partie est de la ville /  
aerial view of the eastern part of the town



Lunenburg : taverne Lennox (1804-1818) /  
Lennox Tavern (1804-18)



Lunenburg : maison Morash (v. 1876) /  
Morash House (c. 1876)