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Cover Page Footnote

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Dating the Morris House: A Study of Heritage Value in Halifax, Nova Scotia

Jonathan Fowler, André Robichaud, and Colin P. Laroque

In 2009, a group of concerned citizens in Halifax rallied to the banner of The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia and the Ecology Action Centre to save an 18th-century building from demolition. Their case for preserving the building hinged on its unique heritage value; it having formerly housed the office of Charles Morris, Nova Scotia's first Chief Surveyor. Thanks to their efforts, the Morris House was temporarily relocated to a nearby vacant lot while a new apartment building gradually rose in its place. Although researchers had believed the Morris House pre-dated 1781, the year of Charles Morris's death, its precise age was unknown at the time of the move. Through a combination of dendroarchaeological, cartographic, and documentary evidence, our research significantly alters previous understandings of the building's history and complicates the narrative advanced by heritage advocates in its defense. In doing so, it also raises questions about the interface between empirical research and the socio-political factors influencing the determination of heritage value.

En 2009, un groupe de citoyen s'est réuni sous les auspices de The Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia et The Ecology Action Centre concerné par la sauvegarde d'un bâtiment du 18e siècle menacé de démolition. Connu sous le nom de Morris Building en raison de liens possibles avec Charles Morris (père), premier chef arpenteur géomètre de la Nouvelle-Écosse, le bâtiment a été déplacé de sa position initiale du 1273 de la rue Hollis de Halifax à un site temporaire à proximité, car un bloc appartement devait y être construit. Bien que les spécialistes croyaient que le Morris Building datait d'avant 1781, son âge exact restait inconnu. Avec la combinaison de recherches dendroarchéologiques, cartographiques et documentaires, notre étude modifie significativement la compréhension de l'histoire du bâtiment et complique le tableau avancé par les défenseurs de la tradition dans la conservation de cet héritage. Ce faisant, la question est posée sur les chevauchements et relations entre la recherche empirique et les facteurs socio-politiques qui influencent la détermination de la valeur historique d'un site.

Introduction

Maybe they should burn it down rather than save it. That was Katie Reid's opinion, at any rate (Kimber 2010). The subject of her incendiary advice was the Morris House, an 18th-century building in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia (FIG. 1). Slated for demolition in 2009 to make way for a new ten-story apartment building, the old wooden house became the focus of a dramatic rescue effort mounted by heritage advocates and their allies, the culmination of which saw the old building hoisted up and slowly trucked across the city to a new home (Spurr 2013). The perils facing old buildings in the path of speculative development are dreadfully familiar to everyone engaged in preserving historical environments (for an interesting global review of the challenges confronting urban spaces, see Tung [2001]), and the friction generated by these struggles is cer-

tainly nothing new to the inhabitants of Nova Scotia's capital city. But perhaps never before had it produced this sort of heat. The contest's vociferousness signaled the presence of something more deeply rooted, and more capable of provoking rancor, than the usual elements of Halifax's ongoing heritage battles. And, as it turned out, the most combustible ingredient was something heritage advocates had themselves injected into the debate. The whole ordeal offers an instructive illustration of the forces that can erupt when the scientific practice of history—in this case relying on archival records, archaeology, and tree-ring analysis—meets the political struggle over heritage preservation and public memory.

Journalists are naturally attracted to statements like Ms. Reid's. They supply ready "contrast" to policy debates, causing ears to prick up and fingers to twitch over keyboards.

Fuel, in other words, for the online world's click economy. But there was an added irony in this instance; Ms. Reid claims Charles Morris, the eponymous homeowner, as an ancestor.

It is surprising that more has not been written about Charles Morris. He was a prominent "army officer, office-holder, and judge" who hailed from Massachusetts and built a successful career in 18th-century Nova Scotia. But he was by no means "just" a government man (Blakeley 1979: 559). Citing Morris's accomplishments as a pioneering cartographer, no less an academic authority than Andrew Hill Clark credits him as, "unquestionably, Nova Scotia's first practical field geographer" (Clark 1968: 344). Many of his maps survive in the National Archives of the United Kingdom at Kew, and it was upon Morris's reputation as chief surveyor—in which capacity he laid out many of Nova Scotia's earliest planned towns, including the capital, Halifax—that heritage advocates established their principal argument for the building's heritage value. In time they would discover that the intrepid surveyor was, at best, a problematic historical figure.

The Context

The volume and vigor of the Morris House debate is partly a product of Halifax's poorly developed regulatory environment. Although it is arguably Canada's oldest planned British town, and while promoters and visitors alike often remark on its historic character, local planning policies and protocols essentially take heritage resources for granted and do not effectively mitigate change. Property owners may do as they wish with the city's historic buildings, and even a municipally registered heritage property may be legally demolished after an owner provides the city council three years' notice.¹ As elsewhere, the narrow ide-

ology of market-based progress may prevent business and political elites from appreciating the historical environment's broader value, including its economic value. But some also suggest Halifax's official disinterest in its heritage is a predictable outcome of a political system in which real-estate and construction companies fund 30% of municipal politicians' campaign costs (Ketterling 2012; Ward 2015; Berman 2016).² Whatever the reason—and it is probably a combination of these factors at least—and despite the absence of an effective system for tracking the city's gradually diminishing built heritage resources, a vocal segment of the public ritually opposes historic Halifax's "death by a thousand cuts." Their voices rise in protest in local newspapers and in social media with each new high-profile demolition and, given their potential to delay the bureaucratic process, must be regarded with suspicion if not open hostility by speculative developers.

Two recent cases illustrate the manner in which Halifax neglects its heritage resources and provide insight into the context that sparked the battle over the fate of the Morris House. The first is the decision by Starfish Properties to paint over the iconic Morse's Teas sign on a prominent early 19th-century warehouse in the city's Historic Properties District (Bousquet 2012). The six-story ironstone-and-brick structure visually anchors the Historic Properties District of the Halifax waterfront and is a prominent feature of the urban landscape. Since the early 20th century, bold block lettering has announced the building's identity on three facades between the fifth and sixth stories. Although "the painted signs are character-defining elements that strongly contribute to the heritage value of the building," according to a municipal staff report, and "the owner did not request approval to alter the

1. Halifax Regional Municipality By-Law Number H-200, "Respecting the Establishment of a Heritage Advisory Committee and a Civic Registry of Heritage Property" (HRM 2014) works in tandem with the provincial Heritage Property Act, "An Act to Provide for the Identification, Preservation and Protection of Heritage Property" (Province of Nova Scotia 2010). The three year waiting period is mandated in section 18.3 of the Heritage Property Act, but even this temporary shield did not apply to the Morris House because it was not a registered heritage property.

2. A recent analysis by a citizen's group shows a positive correlation between corporate donations and the voting behaviours of municipal councillors (Willow Tree Group 2016).



Figure 1. The Morris House at the time of sampling, May 2010. (Photo by Jonathan Fowler, 2010.)

signs" (Taber 2013), the company has faced no sanction other than a few weeks of public outrage. And, despite what seem to have been reassurances to the contrary by Andy Fillmore, a former city planner who at the time of the dispute was employed as the Director of the Dalhousie University School of Planning (Ross 2012), suspicions that Starfish painted over the space to make room for corporate rebranding were confirmed in 2014 (Austin 2013; Bousquet 2014).³

The second case, the demolition of the Halifax Infants' Home by Saint Mary's University, is even more egregious. As with the Morse's Teas Building, the former Infants' Home occupied a prominent location (the corner of two significant thoroughfares, Inglis Street and Tower Road), visually anchoring an adjacent Edwardian streetscape. In this case it was the building's remarkable story as much

as its aesthetic value that brought citizens to its defense, for this building was a rare monument to women's history in Halifax.

The Halifax Infants' Home was founded in 1875 under the leadership of Elizabeth Murray, who ran it with a committee of at least 12 other women (Murray Payzant 1998: 184). The home for infants and unwed mothers operated on this property from 1882, when it purchased an old timber-framed mansion known as the Belvidere. Toward the end of the century, when the old house no longer served their needs, the group raised funds to engage well-known architect J. C. Dumaresq to build a modern replacement. The new home opened its doors in May of 1900, and the building continued to shelter infants and unwed mothers until the post-WWII period, when the expansion of the welfare state made its services redundant (Morton 2005: 121–22).⁴ Saint

3. Mr. Fillmore went on to be elected a Liberal member of the Canadian Parliament for the riding of Halifax in the 2015 Canadian federal election.

4. For a more detailed summary of the history of the Halifax Infants' Home, see Fowler (2012a).

Mary's University purchased the building in 1998 and, shortly thereafter, moved its Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Centre into the space. By 2013, however, the university's administration had built a new language center next door and was not very interested in finding a new use for an old building that its consultants claimed would cost \$10 million to renovate (a price tag contested by experts in heritage architecture).⁵ After months of public debate, and what now appears to have been half-hearted negotiation, the university sent in heavy machinery during the early morning hours of Friday, June 27, 2014 (Willick 2014).

These two cases, though they occurred immediately after the battle to save the Morris House had been won, are nonetheless illustrative of the political climate of the earlier contest, and reveal at least two important aspects of the too-often ad hoc and advocacy-based manner in which heritage resources in Halifax are managed. The first is the practical absence of meaningful heritage property legislation. While alterations to heritage buildings are ostensibly constrained by law, the municipality does not always enforce the rules. Property owners are free to substantially alter or even demolish municipally registered heritage properties after a three-year waiting period. Worse still, unregistered properties like the Infants' Home and the Morris House lack even this temporary protection.

The weakness of Halifax's heritage resource management processes has had the further effect of exposing property owners to potentially damaging and costly agitation or, as they might see it, obstruction, from heritage advocates when the time comes to plan,

and commence capital-intensive construction projects. Opposition of this kind seems generally feared, but never precisely anticipated or, perhaps, never fully understood by a business class whose attention is more focused on spreadsheets than on the cultural environment.

Given this state of affairs, it is no exaggeration to characterize the relationship between Halifax's speculative developers and heritage advocates as a kind of cold war.⁶ Because the business community's assets far outstrip those of its opponents, it is an asymmetrical contest, and the power imbalance drives heritage activists to deploy compelling narratives in order to raise public perceptions of the significance or heritage value of at-risk properties. Absent real political or economic power, they must, in other words, weaponize the past as a pressure tactic. Academic arguments about heritage value based on Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (Parks Canada 2010), as the heritage by-law prescribes, are insufficient in a context where the laws are flimsy or ignored, and where the court of public opinion is the ultimate arbiter.⁷ In the case of the Infants' Home, for instance, heritage advocates employed a gender narrative, emphasizing this message over and over during the course of the struggle. In fact, and not surprisingly, they amplified this message after a scandal erupted in September 2013 over a video portraying students from Saint Mary's participating in a misogynist chant (Globe and Mail 2013; Tutton 2013).

Four years earlier, heritage advocates had followed a similar strategy to promote the heritage value of the Morris House, building a "founding father" narrative around Charles

5. An independent expert in architectural conservation estimated the cost to have been about one-third of what the university-claimed (CBC News 2014b).

6. In June of 2014, Argyle Developments, Inc., sued the board of the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia over its opposition to the construction of the controversial Nova Centre in Halifax's downtown (CBC News 2014a). The trust took issue with the manner in which the municipality had once again modified planning guidelines to permit the construction of the oversized structure, going so far as to grant the corporation one of the streets of the 18th-century town grid. The conflict was settled out of court (Hoare 2014).

7. For the record, the Standards and Guidelines defines heritage value as "the aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present and future generations. The heritage value of an historic place is embodied in its character-defining materials, forms, location, spatial configurations, uses and cultural associations or meanings" (Parks Canada 2010: 5).

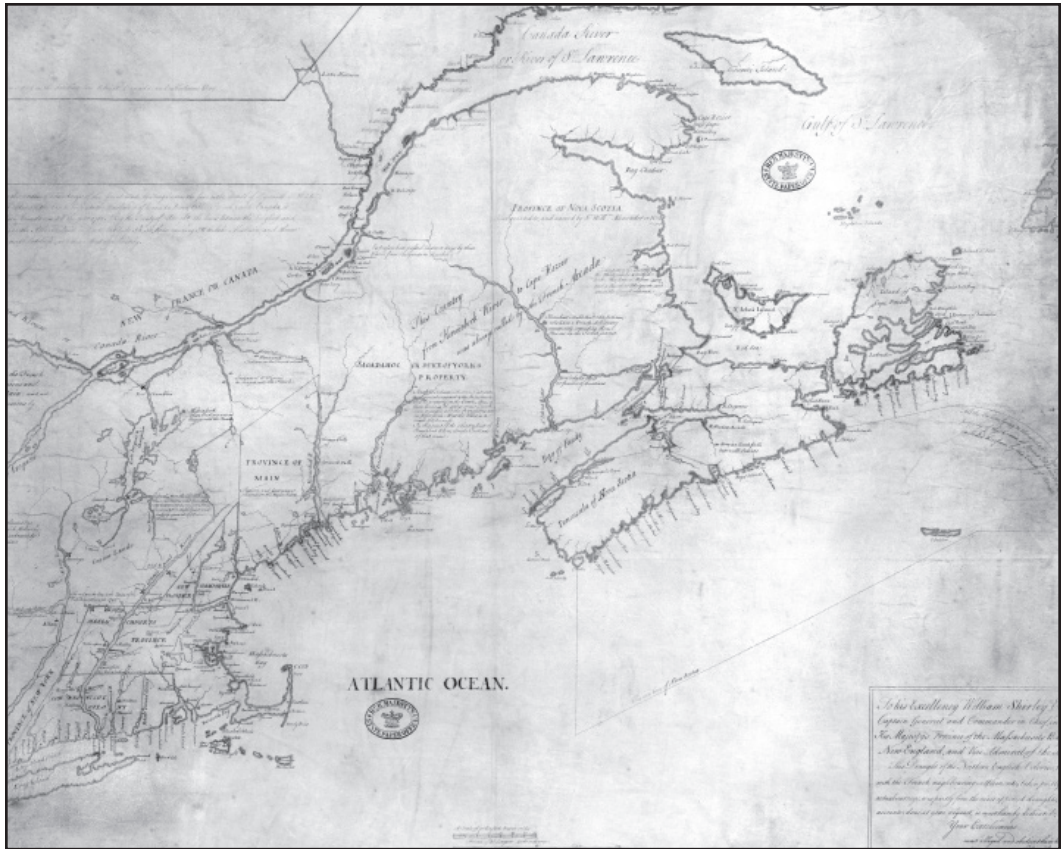


Figure 2. Detail of Charles Morris's 1749 "Draught of the Northern English Colonies, together with the French Neighbouring Settlements". In the mid-18th century, Morris's maps provided crucial intelligence to British officials. (Courtesy of the National Archives of the United Kingdom.)

Morris. This decision had potentially disastrous consequences. So, who was he?

Charles Morris

Morris was born in Boston on June 8, 1711, to a prosperous and well-connected family. His father, also Charles, was a sail maker who is said to have emigrated from Bristol (Eaton 1913: 228). Young Charles's marriage to Mary Read, daughter of the attorney general of Massachusetts, speaks to his family's social standing, but despite this, as Blakeley (1979: 559) laments, very little is known about Morris's early career.

Charles Morris appears to have first come to mainland Nova Scotia in late 1746 as captain of a company of 100 troops sent by Massachusetts

Governor William Shirley to protect Annapolis Royal. His first exposure to his future home is detailed with some care in "A Breif Survey of Nova Scotia," likely penned in 1748 as an intelligence report to Shirley and his staff. In it Morris offers an historical and geographical appraisal of the province, richly embroidered with firsthand observations, some of which, like his narrative of the 1747 Battle of Grand-Pré, had been obtained at great personal risk. Memories of this engagement, in which a French and Indigenous force overwhelmed a numerically superior New England garrison in a midnight attack, nourished a grudge against the neutral French population (later know as the Acadians) that Morris retained until the end of his days (Morris 1748a).

Following a brief sojourn in Massachusetts, Morris once again returned to Nova Scotia in the role of cartographer, executing maps of French settlements in the upper Bay of Fundy that had hitherto been largely neglected by their nominal British rulers (compare Plank [2001: 118])⁸. The story of Morris's cartographical training has not yet been written. Referencing what may have been Morris's first assignment as a cartographer in Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Executive Council President Paul Mascarene simply describes him as a gentleman "well Skill'd in taking Drafts of Coasts, Harbours & land" (Mascarene 1748). Whatever their origins, these skills underwrote his subsequent career.

The conclusion of King George's War in 1748 saw Britain adopt a more assertive stance in Nova Scotia, and the intelligence Morris gathered on the ground informed a new policy oriented toward militarization, Protestant settlement, and the more formal integration of the colony into the British Empire (FIG. 2). Morris's contributions during this policy pivot are noteworthy for their breadth and impact. His regional maps likely saw service during boundary negotiations between the French and British governments following the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (e.g. Morris 1749), but he also remained active on the ground. Working with the assistance of military engineer John Brewse, Charles Morris laid out the street grid for the newly founded town of Halifax in the summer of 1749 (Blakeley 1979: 559; Sutherland 1979: 92–93) and, on September 25, in an act that signified the government's satisfaction with his conduct to date, Morris was appointed chief surveyor of Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Lieutenant Governor's Commission Books 1749). Shortly thereafter he surveyed the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia to the north and south of Halifax, choosing the site of abandoned or mostly abandoned French settlements for the new townships of Lawrencetown

and Lunenburg (compare Blakeley [1979: 560])⁹. This impressive list of achievements provided valuable evidence for the heritage value of the Morris House, bolstering the case for its preservation.

Yet, the mid-18th century was a turbulent time for the inhabitants of northeastern North America. The founding of Halifax occurred during a short lull between two world wars¹⁰ and Charles Morris played an active role in the conflict. Prior to the founding of Halifax, he had conducted background research in order to facilitate plans to settle Protestants among the French inhabitants in Nova Scotia. Plank (2001) has outlined the process by which these plans miscarried. During the subsequent militarization of the province, British officials established forts in the French settlements (Vieux Logis at Grand-Pré in 1749, Fort Edward at Piquid, and Fort Lawrence at Beaubassin in 1750), and ranger companies patrolled the rough roads and trails (Grenier 2008). Geographical knowledge was central to these endeavors, and no one in the British camp was better situated to make this contribution than Charles Morris. By pinning their hopes on such an active proponent of British imperialism, heritage advocates were unwittingly playing with postcolonial fire.

The increased militarization of Nova Scotia reached a crescendo in 1755 with the British capture of Fort Beauséjour and the decision to deport the province's French inhabitants (Hand 2004; Faragher 2005). Here, too, Morris played a key role, despite not being elevated to the executive council until after this momentous step had been taken (Minutes of Council 1753: 221). As noted above, his writings indicate that he had long been suspicious of the loyalties of the neutral French, a fact that emerges early and with some energy in his "Breif Survey" (1748a) and reappears in subsequent work (e.g. 1748c; [1755]). Although it may be inferred that Morris's opinions on this

8. These maps appear to have been drawn in very late 1747 or early 1748 (Morris 1748b; Shirley 1748).

9. One of his maps from this period has been published in Dawson (1988: 119–120). The original manuscript maps are at the National Archives of the United Kingdom (e.g., Morris 1752a; Morris 1752b).

10. The War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War.

matter would have been known to his superiors, it is difficult to measure his impact on the eventual decision to deport the French civilian population. What can now be discerned, however, is that Morris seems to have been drawing up plans for this eventuality as early as 1754 (Faragher 2005: 520–521 n. 18).¹¹

The deportation of the Acadians fundamentally changed the ethnic character of Nova Scotia and significantly hastened the province's formal integration into the British Empire. As the gale of the Seven Years' War began to diminish in the region, particularly after the successful British sieges of Louisbourg (1758) and Québec (1759), Governor Charles

Lawrence turned his attention to the long-delayed objective of Protestant immigration. This was a particularly busy time for Morris, who oversaw the establishment of new townships across the region, often on lands formerly developed by the French inhabitants. Early in this process he can be seen with the Connecticut planters among the ruins of Acadian Grand-Pré, for instance, informing Governor Lawrence in 1760 that the new settlers are "in gen.l are extreme busy in taking down the old houses, digging Cellars & plowing up their lots for gardens" (Morris 1760a). Evidence of his work can also be found at Liverpool, Granville, Cornwallis, Falmouth,



Figure 3. Detail of Charles Morris's 1761 "A Plan of Minas Bason and Cobequid Bay with the Several Towns Granted Thereon," depicting Protestant townships granted upon lands formerly occupied by the Acadians. (Courtesy of the National Archives of the United Kingdom.)

11. To the extent that it seeks to rebalance the deportation narrative somewhat in favor of the Acadian victims, finger the perpetrators, and reframe the whole affair as an instance of ethnic cleansing, Faragher's (2005) work may be thought of as a revisionist study in the postcolonial mold. It is possible that heritage advocates missed the dangers inherent in celebrating Morris's career through an adherence to a more traditional historiography. Faragher appears to be the first historian to have publically singled out Morris's special role in the conflict.

Barrington, and Yarmouth (Blakeley 1979: 560–61). As he had done at Halifax, he laid out the town grids for several of these new communities. He also produced regional maps at smaller scales, plotting the positions of the new townships (FIG. 3). Local surveyors seem to have filled in the detailed cadastral work later (e.g., McNabb [1986: 28]), although Morris sometimes surveyed smaller areas, particularly in cases involving his peers and colleagues in the colonial elite (e.g., Morris 1760b). In the later 1760s he moved on to map Cape Breton and Canso, and the Saint John River (then part of Nova Scotia), and was later active on Saint John's Island (Prince Edward Island), laying out the street grid for Charlottetown in 1768 (Blakeley 1979: 561).

Judging by his attendance record at executive council meetings in Halifax, Morris's last major surveying job may have been in 1769–1770, when he was ordered to help “settle the Limits and boundaries of the Governments of New York and the New Jerseys” (Blakeley 1979: 561). By this time, the wave of pre-Loyalist colonization of the Maritime Provinces had crested. Morris would not live to see the incoming tide of Loyalist refugees, but the political currents set in motion by the American Revolution still touched him. In his later career in Halifax he served as an assistant judge on the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, briefly serving as chief justice (1776–1778), where he presided over the trials of those involved in the Eddy Rebellion, as well as the sedition trial of Malachy Salter (Blakeley 1979: 652).

Like many of his contemporaries in the Halifax elite, Morris owned farmland in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in the former Acadian district of Pisiquid. Many of these rural estates occupied land that had been expropriated from the French (Duncanson 1990). According to Eaton (1913: 289), Morris may have passed away while visiting this rural retreat in late 1781. There, on November 11, 1781, he set his

enfeebled hand to a codicil to his last will and testament, and legal documents associated with his estate indicate that he was dead two days later (Morris 1781). This codicil is relevant to our story because in it the elder Morris records his intention to leave to his son “the office and Store on the North part of my House Lot in Halifax” (Morris 1781). As it happens, Charles Morris Jr., also known as Charles Morris II (1731–1802), not only inherited his father's “office and Store,” but succeeded him in the role of chief surveyor, the duties of which he had already begun to assume by 1776 (Chard 1983).¹²

The Case for Heritage Value

The old house at the center of our inquiry originally stood at the southeast corner of Hollis and Morris streets in Halifax's old south suburbs, and it was here that watercolorist J. S. Clow painted it around 1840 (O'Neill 1999: 58; FIG. 4). Though lacking some of its Victorian embellishments, the Morris House is easily identifiable in Clow's painting by its proportions and distinctive roofline (compare FIG. 1). Beside it stands the more imposing Morris family mansion. As Shutlak (2002: 5) and Pacey (1987: 95–96) observe, the mansion was absorbed into the New Victoria Hotel at the end of the 19th century, while the office building was moved a short distance down the block to 1273 Hollis Street, where it would remain until 2009.

Local toponymy reinforced the property's association with the Morris family, and at least one early history of the city's street names explicitly links this place to Charles Morris I, “the ancestor of that talented family who have been so well known for a long series of years in this community” (Hill 1911: 10). Pacey (1987: 95), going one step farther, identifies the Morris House on the corner as the “office and Store” mentioned in the codicil to the last will and testament of Charles Morris I. Doing so

12. In turn, his son, Charles Morris III (1759–1831), would take up this post in 1802, as would his son, John Spy Morris, in 1831 (Chard 1987).



Figure 4. Watercolor attributed to J. S. Clow depicting the Morris mansion (center) and office (at the corner) at the intersection of Hollis and Morris streets, ca. 1840. (Courtesy of the Nova Scotia Archives; modifications by Jonathan Fowler, 2017.)

not only established 1781 as the *terminus ante quem* for the building's construction—a date subsequently repeated by other researchers, (e.g., J. Morris [2009], Niven [2011], and Shutlak [2002])—but further strengthened the otherwise modest timber building's connection to a founding figure in Nova Scotia's history. For the heritage advocates who rallied to the building's defense, this association was to become its primary source of heritage value. How could such an important building be so callously demolished, they asked; and it was a fair question.

And yet, the regime of values informing their advocacy was premised upon a very traditional—one might even say outmoded—conception of Nova Scotia's history; one that was

not only Eurocentric in orientation, but that implicitly sided with British imperial aims and a cultural evolutionary reading of the past. It found expression in statements like this: "Most of Canada was in a natural state when Charles Morris sat in this building, drawing lines on maps and turning forests into settlements, including Lunenburg, Barrington, Yarmouth, Liverpool, Gagetown, Burton, Saint John, and Charlottetown" (Pacey 2011: 14). Nevertheless, with the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia and the Ecology Action Centre taking the lead, and with the support of Dixel Developments, Ltd., the firm building the new structure, and with the aid of local politicians and Nova Scotia Power, the Morris House was temporarily moved to a nearby vacant lot. This



Figure 5. The sill and floor joists were excellent materials for sampling and dendrochronological analysis. (Photo by Jonathan Fowler, 2010.)

bought time for a longer-term solution to be found.

Serious trouble now arose when it came to public attention that Charles Morris, *pater patriae*, was also one of the architects of the Deportation of the Acadians, which drove nearly 15,000 of Nova Scotia's French Catholic inhabitants from their homes in the mid-18th century (Faragher 2005: 520, n. 18). Understandably, the building's association with a colonial era ethnic cleansing did nothing to advance the case for preservation. Blogs and online comment sections lit up in early 2010, as keyboard combatants mustered to relitigate the Seven Years' War. Ms. Read's call for the house to be burned belongs to this winter of contention. Meanwhile, with the memory of Charles Morris's sins circling overhead, and the building bearing his name resting safely—for now—beyond the wrecking

ball's reach, we began to take a closer look at the structure. The first challenge was to firmly establish its age, and for this we began with tree rings.

Dendrochronology

Dendroarchaeology is the application of tree-ring analysis to the dating of wooden structures (Schweingruber 1988). It uses tree-ring measurements sampled from artifacts or structures and pattern matches their ring-width sequences with reference chronologies of known ages compiled from live trees and/or dated dead trees. It has significant advantages over other methods; namely, it causes little damage to the structure and it yields a reliable date with a precision of one year (or even a particular season within a year). When successful, it assists in proving or disproving speculative

ages derived from unconfirmed oral tradition or from inadequate or otherwise unsatisfactory historical documents. The technique is well known and has been employed only recently in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, almost exclusively by the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory (Pickard et al. 2011; Robichaud and Laroque 2008).

It is important to note that the dendrochronological dates correspond to the felling of trees (cutting date) and not a construction date. The date of a building's construction may be the same year as the cutting date, or some time later, depending on construction procedures. It was not uncommon, for instance, for wood to be cut in the fall, transported to a site by sled in winter, and used for construction in the following summer. Samples that do not preserve the last growth ring (e.g., the wood has deteriorated, the beam was completely squared, etc.) do not represent a cutting date. However, they are valuable because they help corroborate the entire dendrochronological assessment of the structure.

Sampling of the Morris House (Site No. 10CS) was carried out in May 2010. Eleven core samples were taken from the sill and floor joists (FIG. 5), which were easily accessible beneath the recently transported building. Samples

were placed in plastic straws, then labelled and taken back to the lab. The cores were glued onto slotted wooden mounting canes and sanded with sandpaper of increasingly finer grain to expose the annual ring-growth patterns. The annual rings were measured to an accuracy of 0.001 mm at the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory using a 24 in. movable Velmex stage connected to a digital encoder. Raw data were captured by J2X software and put into standard tree-ring decadal format and then indexed using ARSTAN software (Holmes et al. 1986). Ring-width patterns were compared and, when matching, the samples were relatively dated (cross dated) and combined into chronologies.

Using the software COFECHA, the growth patterns in both the single samples and chronologies were pattern matched with regional reference chronologies developed from earlier unpublished work in the region (Holmes et al. 1986; Grissino-Mayer 2001). We also visually tested pattern matching of line graphs of all series with the graphic software DeltaGraph.

Additionally, small portions of selected core samples were used for wood identification using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) available at the Mount Allison Digital Microscopy Facility. The procedure allows pre-

Table 1. Morris House sample information.

| Sample ID | Position in House | Outermost Ring Status*† | Notes | Species | Number of Rings |
|-----------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 10CS001 | Small floor joist | Terminal ring | Damaged sample | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 131 |
| 10CS002 | Big cross beam; floor joist | Terminal ring | | <i>Picea</i> sp. | 129 |
| 10CS003 | Small floor joist | Terminal ring | Damaged sample | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 144 |
| 10CS004 | Sill | 1-3 missing rings | | <i>Picea</i> sp. | 96 |
| 10CS005 | Small floor joist | Terminal ring | | <i>Picea</i> sp. | 84 |
| 10CS006 | Floor joist | Missing rings | | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 69 |
| 10CS007 | Sill | Missing rings | | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 74 |
| 10CS008 | Floor joist | Terminal ring | Not processed | <i>Larix laricina</i> | |
| 10CS009 | Small floor joist | Terminal ring | | <i>Picea</i> sp. | 45 |
| 10CS010 | Floor joist | Terminal ring | | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 100 |
| 10CS011 | Small floor joist | Terminal ring | | <i>Pinus strobus</i> | 122 |

*Outermost ring=last visible growth ring of a sample.

†Terminal ring=the last growth ring from when the tree was cut is present in the sample.

Table 2. Internal correlation of the pine series from the Morris House.

| Sample ID | Interval (Relative Years) | Number of Years | Internal Correlation | Mean Sensitivity | Autocorrelation (Unfiltered) |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| 006 | 226–294 | 69 | 0.525 | 0.220 | 0.942 |
| 010 | 204–303 | 100 | 0.622 | 0.191 | 0.876 |
| 011 | 195–316 | 122 | 0.510 | 0.192 | 0.923 |
| Average | | 97 | 0.555 | 0.198 | 0.911 |

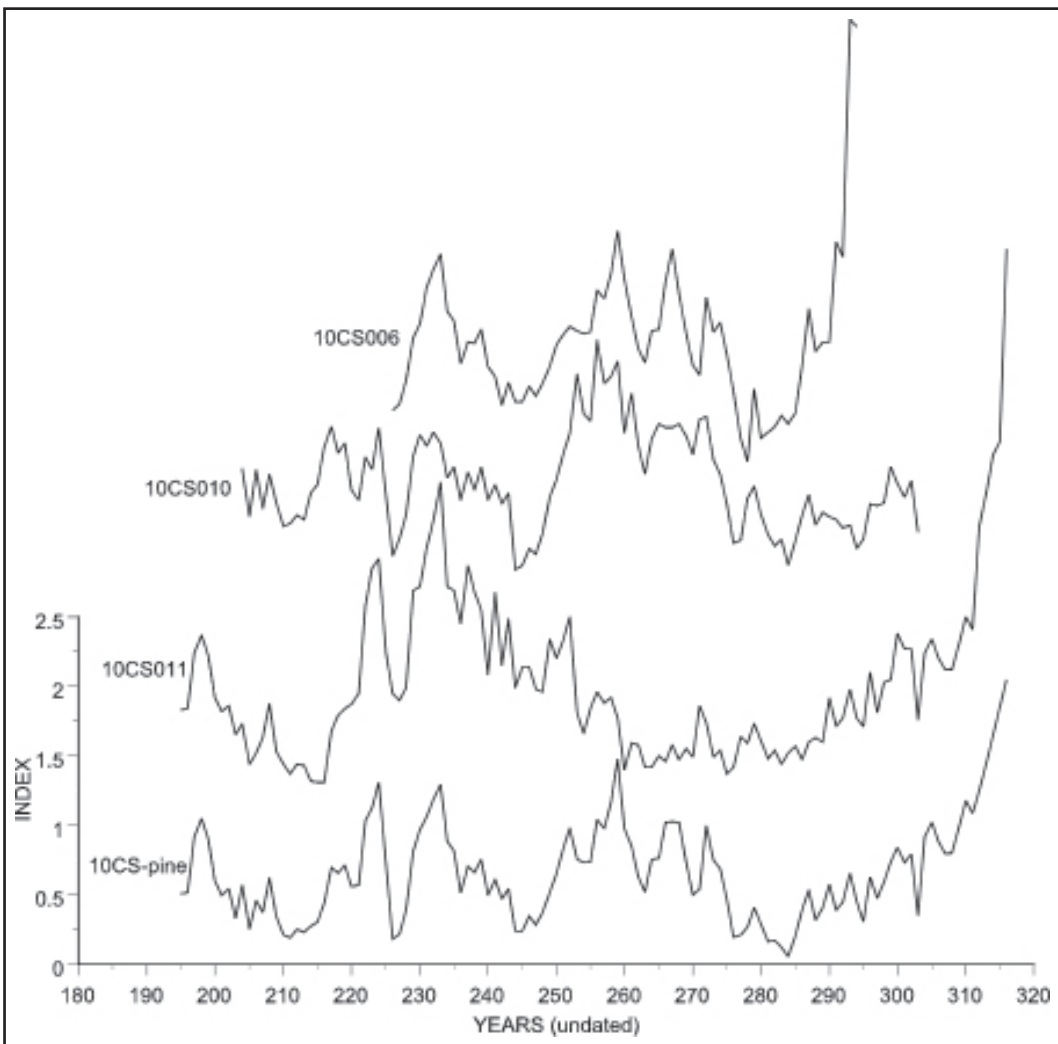


Figure 6. Standardized pine series from the Morris House and the standardized chronology constructed from the series (bottom curve). (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

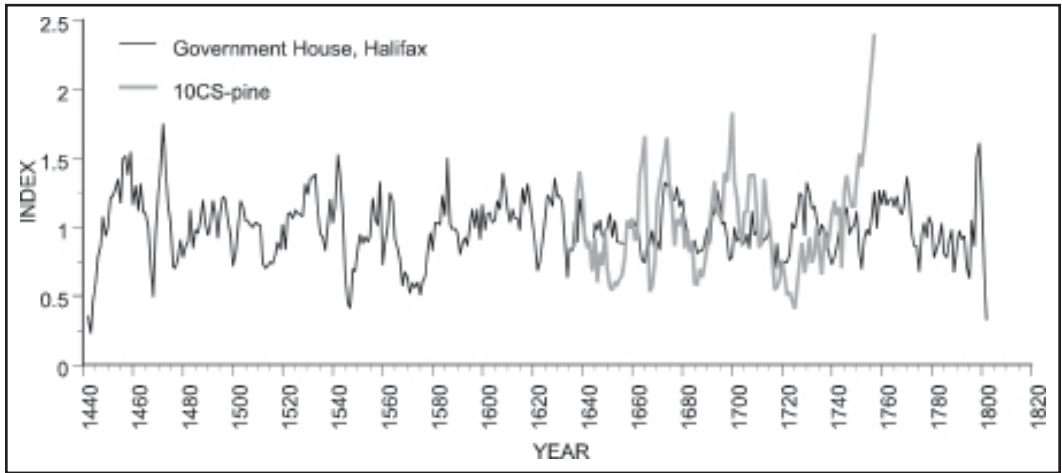


Figure 7. Reference pine chronology (Table 4, Gov4) plotted against the Morris House pine chronology positioned at 1757. (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

Table 3. Reference chronologies used in the cross-dating process.

| ID and Location | Species | Span | Average Age (Years) | N | Internal Correlation Coefficient (P<0.01) |
|--|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----|---|
| 06AML400, Greenwich, Nova Scotia | Pinus strobus | 1819–2006 (188 years) | 148.1 | 34 | 0.534 |
| 06AKL400, Sporting Lake, Nova Scotia | Pinus strobus | 1720–2006 (287 years) | 237.2 | 31 | 0.481 |
| SENB3, southeast New Brunswick | Picea rubens | 1624–1847 (224 years) | 85.7 | 59 | 0.517 |
| NSFY3, northwest Nova Scotia | Picea rubens | 1591–1789 (199 years) | 96.3 | 26 | 0.489 |
| 05BIS900, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia | Picea rubens | 1591–1747 (157 years) | 99 | 5 | 0.466 |
| Gov4, Halifax, Nova Scotia | Pinus strobus | 1442–1802 (361 years) | 243.5 | 17 | 0.501 |

Table 4. Cross-dating Results of Pine Series with Reference Pine Chronology from Gov4.

| Sample ID | Terminal Ring | Possibility 1 | | | Possibility 2 | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|
| | | Correlation with Ref. | GIk (%) | Cutting Date* | Correlation with Ref. | GIk (%) | Cutting Date* |
| 006 | No | 0.302 | 65 | (1735) | 0.069 | 57 | (1788) |
| 010 | Yes | 0.100 | 58 | 1744 | 0.284 | 51 | 1810 |
| 011 | Yes | 0.270 | 56 | 1757 | 0.040 | 54 | 1810 |
| 10CS pine | | 0.204 | 64 | 1757 | 0.214 | 55 | 1810 |

*Cutting date=year that the tree was cut; when in parentheses, year of outermost ring when terminal ring is absent.

Table 5. Internal correlation of the spruce series from the Morris House.

| Sample ID | Interval (Relative Years) | Number of Years | Internal Correlation | Mean Sensitivity | Autocorrelation (Unfiltered) |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| 002 | 186–314 | 129 | 0.348 | 0.182 | 0.925 |
| 004 | 217–312 | 96 | 0.371 | 0.163 | 0.934 |
| 005 | 232–315 | 84 | 0.345 | 0.224 | 0.646 |
| 009 | 257–301 | 45 | 0.431 | 0.142 | 0.900 |
| Average | | 88.5 | 0.366 | 0.182 | 0.858 |

Table 6. Cross-dating results of spruce series with reference spruce chronology 05BIS900.

| Sample ID | Terminal Ring | Possibility 1 | | | Possibility 2 | | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------|
| | | Correlation with Ref. | GIk (%) | Cutting Date* | Correlation with Ref. | GIk (%) | Cutting Date* |
| 002 | Yes | 0.223 | 49 | 1755 | 0.291 | 54 | 1807 |
| 004 | No | 0.325 | 47 | (1753) | 0.476 | 56 | (1805) |
| 005 | Yes | 0.219 | 51 | 1756 | 0.170 | 56 | 1808 |
| 009 | Yes | 0.206 | 52 | 1742 | 0.193 | 55 | 1794 |
| 10CS spruce | | 0.287 | 48 | 1756 | 0.350 | 52 | 1808 |

* Cutting date=year that the tree was cut; when in parentheses, year of outermost ring when terminal ring is absent.

cise wood identification through the recognition of species-specific cell features and structures. This is important because different species may have different growth reactions to the same environmental variables. Knowing the wood species enabled us to cross date the sample with the proper reference chronology with more accurate and reliable results.

Wood identification revealed that out of eleven samples, six were white pine (*Pinus strobus*) (10CS001, -003, -006, -007, -010, and -011), four were spruce (*Picea* sp.) (10CS002, -004, -005, and -009), and one was larch (*Larix laricina*) (10CS008) (TAB. 1).

The six series from the white-pine samples were cross dated with each other to determine their relative positions in time. Out of these six samples, only three were used to build an averaged standardized chronology (TAB. 2; FIG. 6). Samples 10CS001, -003, and -007 were omitted because they could not be cross dated with sufficient statistical and visual confidence. However, the mean correlation calculated using

the three remaining samples remains low ($r=0.20$), although diagnostic rings suggest that the relative position of the series is correct. Individual series and the 10CS pine chronology were compared to white-pine master chronologies (TAB. 3) and one developed from the Government House in Halifax (Pickard et al. 2008) (TAB. 3, Gov4) yielded the best possibilities. Figures 7 and 11 illustrate the best fits found and Table 4 shows statistics from the comparisons of the individual series and the 10CS pine chronology with the reference chronology (Gov4). Note that the Gleichläufigkeit (GIk) is a measure of similarity between two series (Schweingruber 1988: 83). Probably because only three cores could be used in the cross-dating process, two dates emerged: 1757 and 1810. In the case of the pine samples, the 1757 date yielded slightly better individual-series cross-dating statistics than the 1810 possibility.

The four spruce-series samples were also cross dated relative to one other (FIG. 9; TAB. 5).

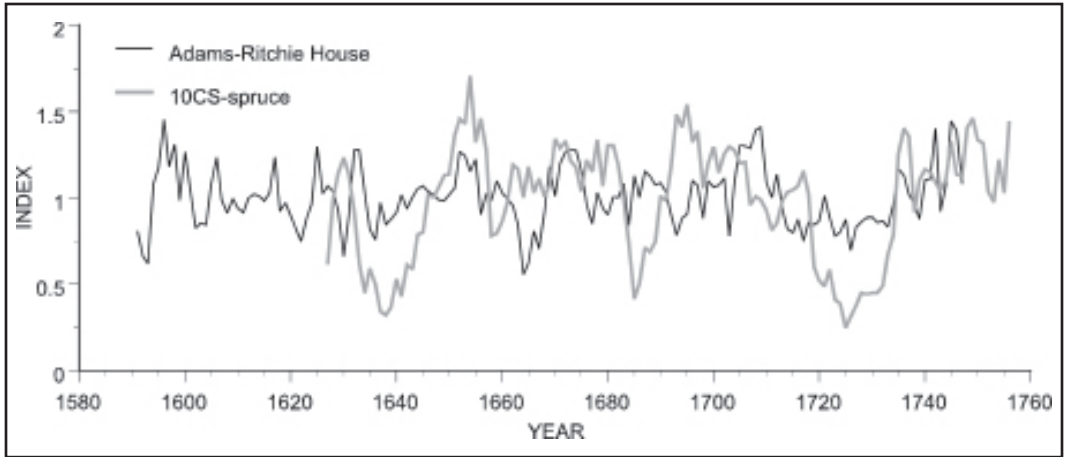


Figure 8. Reference spruce chronology (Table 4, 05BIS400) plotted against the Morris House pine chronology positioned at 1756. (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

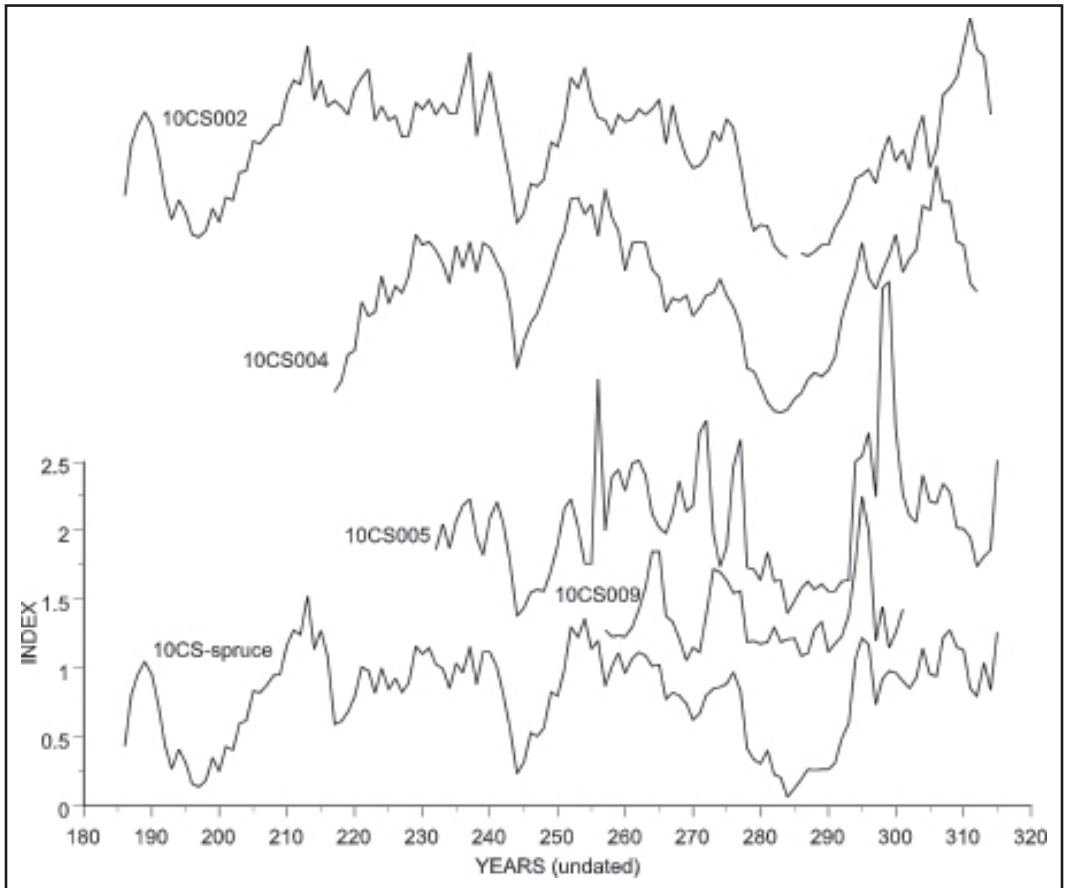


Figure 9. Standardized spruce series from the Morris House and the standardized chronology constructed from the series (bottom). (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

The mean correlation calculated between each sample is significant ($r=0.42$). Individual series and the 10CS spruce chronology were then compared to various spruce master chronologies from Nova Scotia and southeastern New Brunswick (TAB. 3). Comparison was also made between the Morris House spruce and pine series, and the visual pattern match is in agreement, as shown in Figure 10. This suggests that all wood samples are of the same period.

Sample 10CS004 was slightly damaged at the tip of the core on the bark side, which made it difficult to count the terminal rings; it seems that no less than one and no more than three rings may be missing (TAB. 1).

As with the pine series, cross dating the spruce series yielded two possible dates. The first comes from comparing the Morris House spruce series and chronology with 05BIS900 from Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia (TAB. 3). Results are shown in Figure 8 and Table 6 and suggest a cutting date of 1756. The second possible year comes from comparing the 10CS spruce series and chronology with NSFY3 from northwest Nova Scotia, with results pointing toward 1808 (FIG. 12). In this case, statistics are slightly better for the 1808 possibility.

Unfortunately, the larch sample could not be cross dated. It did not match with the few suitable master chronologies available, which were mostly from southeast New Brunswick, nor did it match with the other 10CS building series.

In sum, dendrochronology yielded ambiguous results. Although relatively high measures of internal correlation suggest the pine and spruce timbers grew contemporaneously, two distinct clusters of cutting dates emerged:

one in the mid-18th century (terminus post quem 1757) and one around the turn of the 19th century (terminus post quem 1810). Advancing the interpretation beyond this point required an interdisciplinary approach, which brought us to the archaeological and archival evidence.

Historical Archaeological Research

Up until the time of the public controversy surrounding its fate, the secondary literature concerning the Morris House was sparse. To summarize: the Morris family's longstanding association with this south suburbs property—memorialized with a street name—had been interpreted as evidence that Charles Morris I once lived at the corner of Hollis and Morris streets (Hill 1911). This assumption, when later read alongside the 1781 codicil to his last will and testament, had been taken to indicate that the old building was, in fact, the office of Charles Morris I, and that this structure must, therefore, predate 1781 (Pacey 1987). The only other historical evidence attesting to the building's antiquity was the Clow watercolor (FIG. 4), thought to date to ca. 1840, which shows the office standing next door to the Morris family mansion.

The mansion's construction date, though uncertain, has been estimated on the basis of architectural style to be ca. 1820 (Niven 2011; Shutlak 2002; Garry Shutlak 2017, pers. comm.).¹³ This date accords with the Clow watercolor. Our archival research turned up extensive evidence in the form of bills, invoices, and accounts that suggests Charles Morris III was engaged in building or extensively remodeling a house—possibly the mansion, the office, or another building—over the course of 1827–1828.¹⁴ Whatever the case, an

13. Citing poor planning, severe winter conditions, and resistance from the developer, the archaeologist directing the project characterizes it as "more of an archaeological salvage project than an excavation" (Niven 2011: 13). Budget restrictions also limited the archival research to "barebones research" (Niven 2011: 3).

14. A variety of receipts for construction materials and labor are preserved among the papers of Charles Morris III. Although these records do not specify what was being built or where, the list would appear to match a project on the scale of the mansion house subsequently painted by Clow, or perhaps renovations to the office, or perhaps to another building or buildings. They include a receipt for 2,000 spruce shingles and 1,000 pine shingles from James Ives dated June 5, 1827 (Morris Family Papers 1827: 12j); a receipt confirming payment to Sergeant Watterson of the Rifle Brigade, dated October 24, 1827, for carpentry work on a house (Morris Family Papers 1827: 12k); a receipt dated July 17, 1827 from Joseph Moore for 11 bushels of lime and 1 barrel of white(wash?) (Morris Family Papers 1827: 12r.); a receipt dated November 17, 1827 from Patrick Newman for construction work and materials (Morris Family Papers 1827: 12.1); a receipt dated January 9, 1828 for chimney work and plastering done October 21–November 15, 1827 (Morris Family Papers 1828: 12.2t); and a record of pur chases from a Mr. William Merrick for windowpanes, turpentine, and other materials through the year of 1828 (Morris Family Papers 1828: 12.3k).

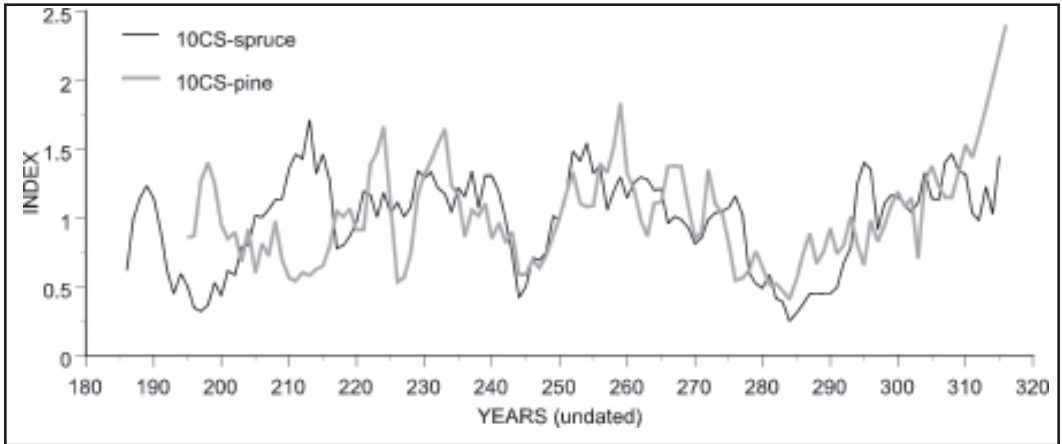


Figure 10. Standardized chronologies from the Morris House pine and spruce series. Note that both curves have strong similarities, which suggests the timbers are contemporary. (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

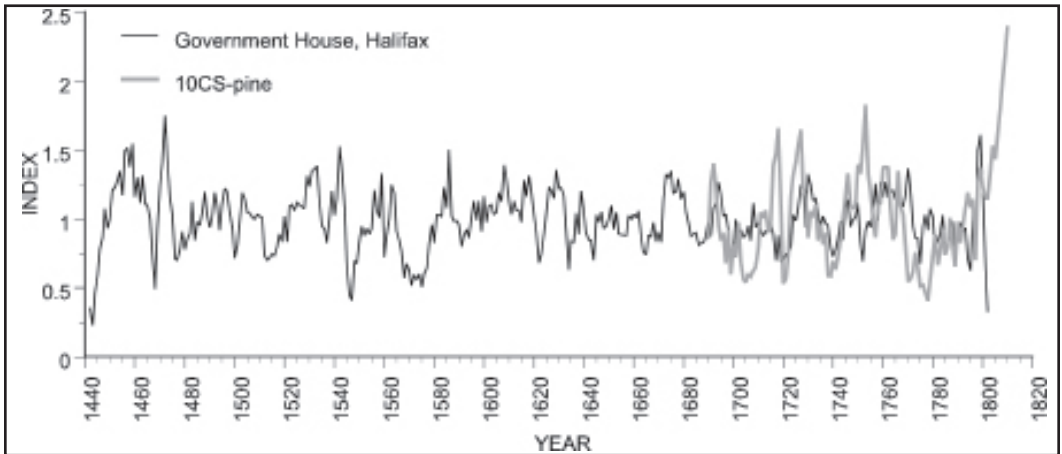


Figure 11. Reference pine chronology (Table 3, Gov4) plotted against the 10CS pine chronology positioned at 1810. (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

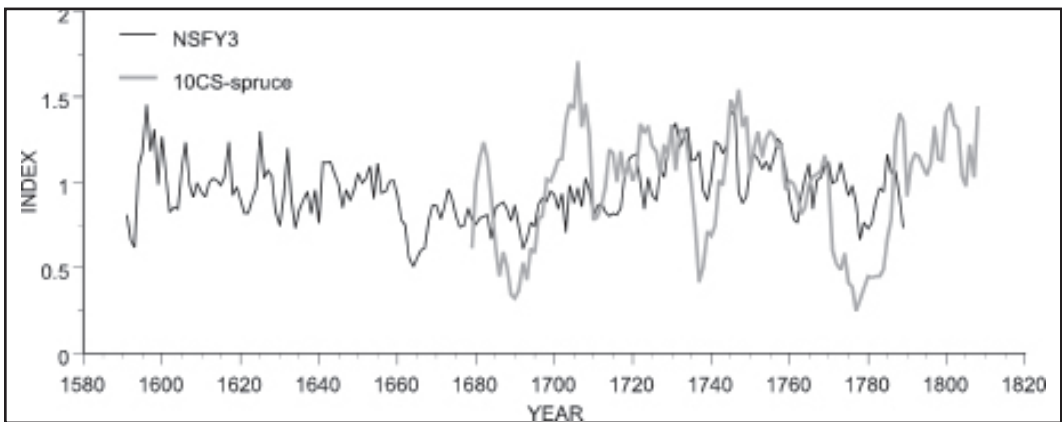


Figure 12. Reference spruce chronology (Table 3, NSFY3) plotted against the 10CS pine chronology positioned at 1808. (Figure by André Robichaud, 2017.)

1820s construction date for the mansion excludes Charles Morris I (1711–1781) and Charles Morris II (1731–1802) as potential occupants. Date ranges alone point to Charles Morris III (1759–1831) as the mansion’s builder, and he seems to have done it toward the end of his life.

Unfortunately, field archaeology could shed little additional light on the mansion’s origin. Construction activities at the former site of the Morris House in January and February of 2010 were subject to archaeological mitigation, but only after the old buildings had been removed or demolished. Any possibility of learning more from the fabric of the old Morris mansion, since incorporated into the rambling edifice known as the New Victoria Hotel, was consequently lost. A team of archaeologists

recorded a number of subsurface features in the area, including the foundations, central hearth base, and cellar of the Morris mansion. They also traced a French drain leading from the mansion’s cellar and another running from the original site of the Morris House at the corner of the property. The course of this latter drain was only partially intact, however, and the excavators surmised that most of it had been destroyed in 1898 during the construction of the New Victoria Hotel. The original Morris House foundations at the corner of the property also seem to have disappeared at this time (Niven 2011: 4–6; Shutlak 2002: 5). The fact that the house on the corner shared a drainage system with the Morris mansion is interesting, but, unfortunately, no datable artifacts were recovered from either section of drain, nor

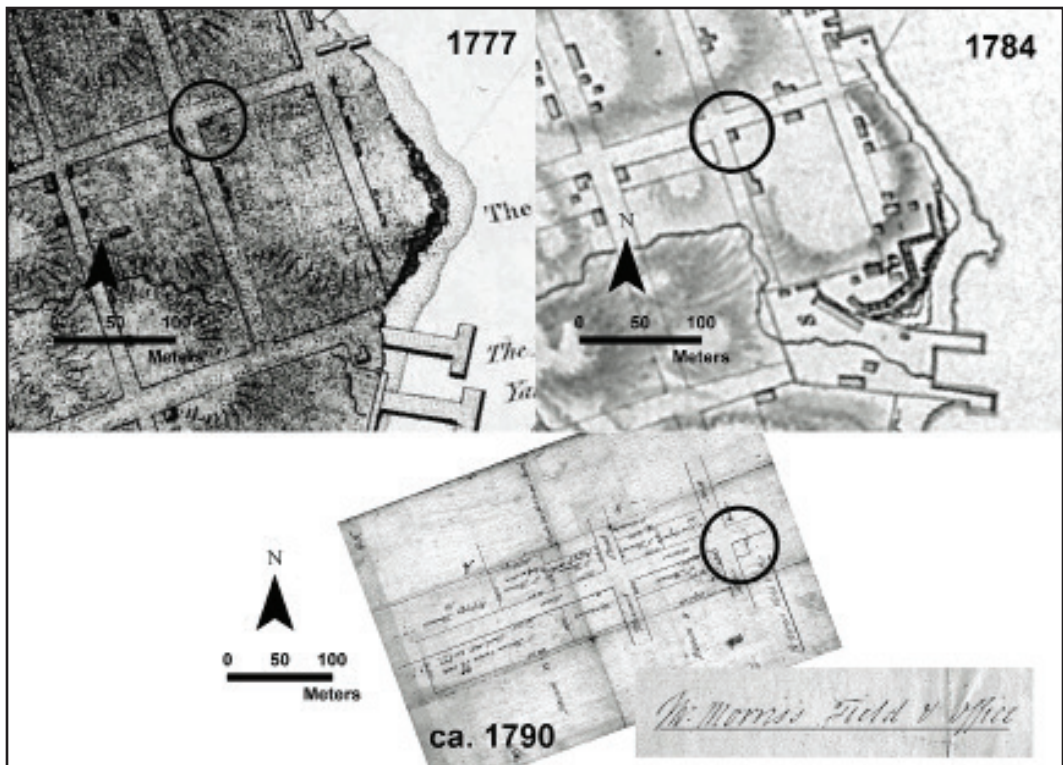


Figure 13. Details of three late 18th-century maps of Halifax’s south suburbs depicting a single building as the sole occupant of the lot at the northwest corner of Hollis and Morris streets (circled). Left: J. F. W. DesBarres (1777) “The Harbour of Halifax”; Right: Charles Blaskowitz (1784) “A Plan of the Peninsula, upon which the Town of Halifax Is Situated...; Bottom: Crown Land Information Centre (1790). (DesBarres, courtesy of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich; Blaskowitz, courtesy of the National Archives of the United Kingdom; Crown Land Information Center image, courtesy of the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources; Figure by Jonathan Fowler, 2018.)

were construction contexts associated with the mansion identified during what the principal investigator admits was essentially a salvage excavation. Nevertheless, the morphology of the drains suggests that, if they were built sequentially rather than at the same time, the office building's drain may have been the older of the two, for its trajectory is straight, while the one draining the mansion ties into it. Limited though it may be, then, the archaeological evidence hints that the office is older than the 1820s mansion.

The cartographic record also supports the notion that the office predates the mansion, at least if one accepts the proposition that the structure appearing on old maps is the same building painted by Clow in 1840. Several 18th-century maps clearly show a single building there (FIG. 13),¹⁵ and one crude but large-scale plan from the pre-mansion era goes so far as to depict a solitary building at the corner labelled "Mr. Morris's Field and Office" (Crown Land Information Centre 1790). Though this last plan is undated, contextual clues demonstrate that it likely predates 1793. That helps, but to which Charles Morris does it refer?

Land grants and deeds of sale fill the remaining evidentiary gaps. They reveal that the property in question was originally granted not to Charles Morris I, who was present at the foundation of Halifax, but rather to John Baragon, who received it from the Crown in March of 1750 (Halifax Allotment Book 1750: 57). However, because Baragon earned only £2 10s. when he sold the property three years later to Dennis Heffernan, a cooper, it is probable that Baragon sold only an empty lot (Halifax Deeds 1753: 174).¹⁶

The land records indicate the property remained in Heffernan's hands for the next 24 years, a time span encompassing the older set

of tree-ring dates from the Morris House. In 1777, Heffernan sold this property and the adjacent lot to Charles Morris II—not his controversial father—for £65, a leap in value that further suggests the construction of a house during Heffernan's tenure (Halifax Deeds 1777: 164). This is likely the structure appearing on the maps above, and, if it is the same building painted by Clow around 1840, then it is also the present Morris House. A final clue among the Morris family papers further connects Charles Morris III to our mysterious building and the Baragon-Heffernan-Morris II property. In an 1802 letter in which he refers to his recently deceased father, Charles Morris III laments that he has "nothing coming to me from the Estate except the office" (Morris 1802).¹⁷

Taken together, then, this chain of cartographic and documentary evidence tips the scales heavily toward the 1757 tree-ring date. It now seems clear that the "office and Store" Charles Morris I bequeathed to his son in 1781 is not likely to have been the threatened building at the corner of Hollis and Morris streets. The codicil to the elder Morris's will describes the "office and Store" as standing on his "House Lot" in Halifax (Morris 1781), and land records clearly identify the house lot of Charles Morris I as Lot H7 in Forman's Division, on the other side of town (Halifax Allotment Book 1749: 12). In other words, in what might come as something of a surprise to those who campaigned to save the old building as a memorial to Charles Morris I, there is no evidence that this problematic founding figure ever lived or worked at this property in the south suburbs. His son bought it from Dennis Heffernan, who appears to have been responsible for building it. Fortunately, it was not burned down like Katie Reid suggested. If our

15. The corner property was designated F18 in the original surveys (Jackson 1945).

16. The legal language in the deed is formulaic and does not identify specific buildings.

17. Even this apparently definitive piece of evidence is not without ambiguity. The last will and testament of Charles Morris II indicates that he wished for his real estate to be sold and the proceeds divided among his heirs, and that his "Law Books, and Surveying Instruments of every kind in the Office [emphasis added]" be given to his son, Charles, who would succeed him in the role of Surveyor General (Morris 1802). Only his dwelling house was exempt from this order. It may be, therefore, that Charles Morris II and his family occupied the house purchased from Heffernan in 1777, that this building later came into the hands of Charles Morris III, and that he converted it into an office, possibly around the time he built his mansion house in the 1820s.

analysis is correct, the 'Morris House' may be the oldest house in the Halifax.¹⁸

Conclusions

Between January 25 and 27, 2013, the Morris House was transported across Halifax to a new site in the city's north end. It crept slowly, by night, as work crews gingerly raised or lowered power lines along the route to clear a path (CBC News 2013). It now stands at the corner of Creighton and Charles streets, where it is being renovated by the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association to be repurposed as housing for low-income and at-risk youth. Viewed from an environmental lens, the move and renovation fulfilled the Ecology Action Centre's objective of saving a perfectly serviceable building—whose carbon costs had been invested in the 18th century—from being dumped in a landfill. For the Heritage Trust, rescuing an important part of the city's architectural heritage was an end in itself.

When we began our research, we expected that tree-rings would be the key to dating the building, but the ambiguous results suggested a construction date either in or shortly after 1808 or 1757. The key did not quite fit the lock. Cartographic evidence favors the older date because at least three late 18th-century maps depict a building resembling the Morris House at the corner of the block, in the same location where Clow painted the Victorianized Morris House around 1840.¹⁹ Textual evidence, especially land records, likewise supports the 1757 date. Taken together, the exercise offers a lesson in the merits of interdisciplinarity.

Beyond dating the building, archival sources identify Dennis Heffernan as the man most likely responsible for its construction. Compared to the Morris family, though, colonial records are unfortunately far less revealing here. Heffernan came to Halifax in 1752, was appointed a culler of hoops and staves in 1754



Figure 14. Signage marking the former site of the Charles Morris office in Halifax's south suburbs. The sign erroneously associates the building with the life and career of Charles Morris I. (Photo by Jonathan Fowler, 2010.)

(Akins 1895: 44), and in 1775 was assessed as owning property worth £350 (Commissioner of Public Records 1775: 7). That he was married may be inferred from the presence of children in the record, one of whom, also named Dennis, would later become one of Nova Scotia's first native-born surgeons (Marble 1997: 312). Despite his relative historical anonymity, Dennis Heffernan nevertheless left an important legacy, both human and architectural.

Ironically, Charles Morris I appears to have played no role whatsoever in the story of the building that today bears his name. His son, Charles Morris II, apparently purchased it from Heffernan in 1777. This act may be the origin of the name of Morris Street, which Hill (1911) misinterpreted, perhaps due to his preoccupation with illustrious figures from the city's history. Researchers in the heritage community inadvertently reinforced this error, partly because they ignored primary source evidence, but perhaps also because the building's association with a founding figure was too appealing a narrative to pass up (Pacey 1987). Their dedication to this story only hardened as the battle over the fate of the old house—and the need for narrative ammunition—intensified.

18. The only contender for this title would be the Little Dutch Church, a single-story, timber house built in 1756 and subsequently converted into a place of worship (Canada's Historic Places 2010).

19. One must acknowledge the remote chance that the present building was not the structure depicted on these maps, but a later replacement, for it is really only with Clow's painting that we can securely identify the building on the corner with the present Morris House. If such an undocumented swap took place, the 1808 tree-ring date may mark the occasion.

Nobody who has been paying attention is any longer surprised when the sinews of authority flex beneath history's pages. Some theorists of history argue that social power is always inseparable from historical narration (Jenkins 2003; Trouillot 2015). Considering the value of material remains as touchstones of the past, it is fitting that archaeologists have joined scholars from other disciplines in documenting the manipulation of memory, particularly in the service of state interests (e.g., Brooks and Mehler [2017], Hobsbawm and Ranger [1983], Lowenthal [1985], and Smith [2006]). The case of the Morris House shows us that local actors—in this case heritage advocates—can be as enterprising as state agents and other elites in fashioning political tools from the past. The result of their efforts in this case are in some respects as ambiguous as our tree-ring dates.

Surely, the efforts of the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, the Ecology Action Centre, and their allies should be applauded. They have saved from needless demolition what now appears to be the oldest surviving timber house in Halifax. But one laments that this achievement, which ought to have unfolded through the application of rational policy, was purchased instead through bitter contestation and the distortion of public memory. It may be fitting that the street corner on which the Morris House formerly stood is now marked by a handsome sign erroneously identifying it as the site of the office of Charles Morris I (FIG. 14).²⁰ It is far less a memorial to the old surveyor general than to Halifax's broken heritage management system and to the malleability of historical memory under the pressures of even local politics.

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20. The sign was unveiled in July 2013, over a year after research published in the Heritage Trust's journal disproved the building's association with Charles Morris I (Fowler 2012b; Snapd Halifax 2013).

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