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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Preservation Landmark Re-opens

On June 22, 1991, Barnum House, one of Ontario's most celebrated architectural legacies, will re-open after a major restoration thanks to community support and funding from the property's new owner, the Ontario Heritage Foundation. Located on Highway 2 just west of Grafton, this imposing c1817 residence built by Lieutenant-Colonel Eliakim Barnum first caught the eye of architectural preservationists in the 1930s. Designed in the neo-classic taste, Prof. Eric Arthur, one of Ontario's first preservationists, said "there was no house of its type superior to it in North America." In 1939, Arthur persuaded the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, a group founded in 1933 and dedicated to the preservation of the province's architectural heritage, to purchase the property and to carry out its first restoration.

Opened by the Lieutenant Governor in 1940, Barnum House, was a restored house "living museum", one of the first of its kind in Ontario. Shortly afterwards, the museum came into the possession of the Township of Haldimand who operated it until 1982 when it was purchased by the Foundation. After 50 years, the venerable old museum was in need of repair. The Ontario Heritage Foundation and a great deal of community involvement have, through the second restoration, brought to the project a half century of technological and interpretative resources that its first restoration spawned. The County of Northumberland operates and administers the historic site and when opened, it will provide a heritage focus for the community. The house will be restored to the period 1820-1840 and offer revolving exhibits and special programmes for schools, visitors and community groups. It will be available for community functions and also provide a resource centre where information regarding restoring buildings can be obtained. In future, the museum staff hope to house an archives.

The public is invited join Rosario Marchese, the Minister of Culture and Communications, for the grand re-opening. The formal ceremonies will take place at 1 pm, followed by a strawberry tea. Barnum House is located an hour and a half east of Toronto. For more information, call Barnum House curator, Cyndie Paul-Girdwood at 416 349 2656.

Barnum House's beautiful proportions and refined trim represent the pinnacle of good taste from the Loyalist period. Restrained, yet with handsome ornamental trim, the house occupies a prominent position on the north side of historic Highway 2 between Cobourg and Grafton. The house, a two storey centre with gable projecting towards the street and flanking one storey wings, overflows with architectural detail - pilastered facade, fan-lit doorcase, arcading and classically inspired cornice. Most unusual is the flushboard cladding of the facade, one of the few extant examples in Ontario.

The house was built by Eliakim Barnum who came to Upper Canada in 1807. A man of means, he paid 300 pounds for his farm lot. His first house was accidentally burned by soldiers billeted there during the War of 1812. He took this opportunity to build a stylish house in keeping with his growing social position. It is said that he imported workers from the United States to work on the house. Here Barnum, who later became a Lt-Colonel of the Third Northumberland Battalion, with his wife Hannah Ewing, raised a family of four. In the 1840's, Barnum updated the interior but the exterior has remained virtually unchanged. In 1877, at the ripe old age of 94 and one of the province's oldest citizens, Barnum died at his magnificent home. His family continued to own the house for another forty years.

The present restoration has been carried out in two phases. The first involved the exterior restoration and the second saw the renewal of the interior and the construction of an addition at the rear to accommodate meeting rooms, storage space and a lift for the handicapped. Future work will include the restoration of the landscape around the house.

Barnum House will be open all year round. Curator Cyndie Paul-Girdwood, who refers to the house as one of Ontario's architectural treasures, predicts the museum will be a "multi-faceted community centre" offering something for everyone.