

FHBRO Number 90-031

The Lazaretto

Grosse-Île, Quebec

The Lazaretto was constructed in 1847 as detention housing for new immigrants. It relates to the first major period of occupation of Grosse-Île. The plans for the Lazaretto were prepared by an officer of the Department of Public Works. Not long after it was built, the Lazaretto was converted to a hospital and was used as such until the quarantine station was closed in 1937. Used as a henhouse during the Second World War, it now serves as a warehouse. The current owner, Agriculture Canada, is to transfer ownership to Parks Canada in the near future. See FHBRO Report No. 90-31 (Part 1: 1832-1860).

Reasons for Designation

The Lazaretto has been designated Classified because of its association with important themes in the history of Canada, the excellence of its functional design, and because it marks a spatial division of Grosse-Île.

In 1832, Grosse-Île became a quarantine station for the port of Québec, a major port of entry for immigrants arriving in Canada from Europe. Some immigrants carried cholera and other epidemics that were spreading to North America at the time, so they were quarantined for a time on Grosse-Île. In 1847, the year of the typhus epidemic, over 90,000 immigrants landed at Québec, many of whom were carriers or already sick. Several hospitals and lazarettos had to be built in the east section of the island. The last remaining lazaretto from this key period in the island's history is the oldest immigration building still standing.

The functional design of the Lazaretto reveals a great deal about the state of medical knowledge and hospital techniques at the time. The perceived benefits of fresh air and natural light dictated that the building include ventilators and many windows. Since the building had to be partially prefabricated to facilitate the construction process, these components were made in the city of Québec and installed on-site on Grosse-Île.

Primarily because of the Lazaretto, it is still evident today that the east section of the island was the hospital area. This long and very old building remains the primary structure of the east section.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Lazaretto resides in its overall volume, the components attached to the building envelope relating to its use as a hospital, its high-quality construction, and its impact on the east section of the island.

By virtue of its form and workmanship, the Lazaretto is associated with vernacular architecture. Its major features are its considerable length, broken up by numerous

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openings, and the shape of its roof with large dormers. The rectangular plan of the building is unbroken, and the southern facade overlooks the St. Lawrence River.

Originally, there were doors and windows in the north and south facades of the building. This configuration was later modified; the number of windows in the south wall was doubled, and some windows on the north side were walled over and others created. If the building is to be restored, some of those windows should be reinstalled to reflect its use as a hospital.

The regularity of the four gabled dormers on the south slope of the roof is a key component of the aesthetic value of the structure. The use of shingles on the main roof and on the dormer roofs and sides is another defining element.

Several surviving elements indicate that it was necessary to ventilate the building when it was used as a hospital. Two vent shafts rising through the attic space are connected to ventilation towers mounted at the peak of the roof. There are louvers in the upper part of the exterior wall cladding to either side of the main door. Each of these louvers in the south facade formerly had a matching louver in the opposite wall. The paired dormers, with their one-piece louvers and movable shutters, also served to ventilate the building. All these elements should be restored.

Although the lazaretto was originally designed as a shelter, it has survived in relatively good condition, undoubtedly because of the high standard of workmanship and materials that went into its construction. Evidently the joints used to assemble the framing were wisely chosen and well executed. Some structural weaknesses, however, have developed in the footings and roof. Consolidation will be necessary to preserve this classified building.

After the quarantine station was shut down, the interior of the lazaretto was modified to serve several different purposes. These modifications have had little impact on the original interior walls, which have survived intact. The walls and ceilings are covered with wood panelling. Wood panelling is typical of this form of vernacular architecture, and restoration is recommended.

When the construction of 1847 was completed, the east section of the island contained several hospitals and housing units for medical staff. Almost none of these structures remain today. The lazaretto and the cemetery are the sole vestiges of this period associated with the fight against contagious diseases. To show the lazaretto in the best possible way, it will probably be necessary to clear away the thickets that have grown up around it over the years.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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Translation