

FHBRO Number 93-19

Montreal, Quebec

Canadian Grenadier Guards Armoury

4171 Esplanade Avenue

The Canadian Grenadier Guards Armoury was built in 1913-1914, according to plans prepared by the Montreal firm McVicar & Heriot. This armoury is the property of the Department of National Defence and continues to be used for its original purpose. See FHBRO Building Report 93-19.

Reasons for Designation

The Canadian Grenadier Guards Armoury was designated Recognized for historical reasons, for its design and workmanship qualities, as well as for its environmental qualities.

Created in 1859 under the name First Battalion, Volunteer Militia Rifles of Canada (First Prince of Wales' Rifles), the Canadian Grenadier Guards Regiment (6th Battalion, Canadian Guards) is one of the oldest volunteer militia regiments in Canada. Its main victories are South Africa (1899-1900), Vimy Ridge, France and Flanders (1916-1918), the Rhineland and Northwestern Europe (1944-45).

The building itself is an important relic of the history of military architecture in Canada. Its construction was prompted by the reform of the militia undertaken in the 1890s by Frederick Borden, Minister of the Militia and Defence, and continued after 1911 by his successor, Sir Sam Hughes.

The program of this armoury included drill, teaching and recreational facilities, elements considered innovative at the time. The two-hinged steel trusses, which were left exposed, were also a sign of "modernity". Through its Edwardian Revival style facade and because its relationship with the street and the neighbouring homes has remained unchanged, this building fits in with its environment in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of this red-brick armoury resides in its general form, in the decorative treatment of its facade and in its effective integration with the surrounding neighbourhood.

Its compact plan expresses the program developed by the federal government for

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buildings of this type at the turn of the century. The large drill hall, topped with a pitched roof, separates the “head house” from the rear block, sections which house the administrative services and the utilitarian areas. It would be appropriate to preserve the integrity of this overall plan and the volumes which clearly reflect the building’s functions.

For the treatment of the “head house,” the designers chose the Edwardian neoclassical style and opted for a symmetrical composition. On the facade, the emphasis is placed on the main entrance, an effect achieved by the contrast between the red brick and the architectural details in grey stone that highlight the portal and the window located above. There are also other stone elements such as the coat of arms, bands between storeys, window sills, entablatures and keystones. In addition, brick is used decoratively around the windows and the panels separating them. The Edwardian Revival character is accentuated by two small copper-domed towers which rise above the roof, revealing four bull’s eye windows.

All of these architectural elements define the heritage character of the Armoury. Preventive measures must therefore be instituted to ensure their integrity and longevity. Great care must be taken when cleaning, repairing or replacing original materials such as brick, stone, copper and old mortar. Conservation specialists should be consulted for all this work, particularly for the repointing of the brick walls. Special attention should also be paid to the large wooden portal, which allows the troops to enter the Armoury, as well as its ironwork.

The treatment of the walls and other parts of the building is very sober. Only the windows inserted under the flattened brick arches and the bricks used to mark the upper level of the rear block add a decorative note. This treatment of the openings and of the masonry walls should be respected. Should some of the bricks have to be replaced, care should be taken to match the new ones to the existing facing and to reproduce the same type of joint. Several windows were blocked up with cement, without any concern for aesthetics. It would be better to restore the original openings, even if the windows must be blocked up from the inside, if necessary.

The clear and functional lines of the painted masonry walls and the utilitarian floors clearly are representative of military interiors at the turn of the century. The period fittings and finishes should be preserved insofar as possible. The exposed steel

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trusses of the drill hall are still intact. Out of respect for the designer and for the integrity of the building, they should be left exposed and receive preventive maintenance.

The space separating the main facade from Esplanade Street is very well laid out and should be maintained since it permits a better reading of the building. The recommendations made earlier concerning the masonry should apply to the low stone walls that border the entrance ramp.

On the whole, the Armoury is perfectly integrated into its environment, comprised mainly of brick residences of three storeys or less. Efforts should be made to ensure that this harmonious integration is preserved.

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