

FHBRO Number 90-031a

First-class Hotel (No. 14)

Grosse Île, Québec

The First-class Hotel was constructed in 1912. The building plans were undoubtedly prepared by an architect in the Department of Public Works. It was used as sergeants' quarters during the Second World War. Today, the guest room wings are not used, and the central portion houses the kitchen, the lunch room, and rooms for employees and visitors. The First-class Hotel is owned by Parks Canada. See FHBRO Report No. 90-31 (Part IV: 1901-1 920).

Reasons for Designation

The First-class Hotel on Grosse Île has been designated Classified because it is one of the finest examples illustrating the themes of immigration and quarantine in Canada. Its aesthetic design relates to the resort hotel tradition, while the use of concrete makes it a very modern building for its time. Its presence enhances the current character of the west section of the island.

The economic boom in the early years of the 20th century gave rise to a level of immigration that was unprecedented in the history of Canada. The construction of the First-class Hotel is an example of the major improvements to the station at the time, and stemmed from the pressure exerted by large ocean-liner operators who wanted to provide their healthy clientele with accommodations that were appropriate to their passenger class.

The treatment of the central wing and the symmetrical composition of the building gives it a monumental character. Viewed from a short distance, the central wing looks like a large middle-class home that was modernized by the use of a “new” material—concrete. The many refined elements of the interior finishes created a warm ambiance for guests. Careful planning and the high quality of materials and workmanship have contributed greatly to its excellent state of conservation.

Despite the demolition of several related buildings, the environment surrounding the First-class Hotel has retained an air of bygone days. The building is one of several that was devoted to accommodating healthy immigrants. Erected on an outcrop, and therefore fully visible from the wharf, it is a major landmark for local staff and visitors arriving at Grosse Île.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the First-class Hotel resides in its overall form, the harmonious composition of its facade, the choice of modern materials and construction methods, and the elements of interior decor.

The building is composed of four sections, each eminently suited to a specific purpose.

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The three-storey central wing, containing the common areas, separates the two long two-storey wings containing the rooms. At the rear is a central annex containing the kitchen. No changes should be made to this layout, which is still virtually as it was when built, an indication of how effective the original design was. The form of the roofs and the arrangement of the openings, reflecting the spatial organization within the hotel, should also remain as they are.

Aside from the two gables with false half-timbering, the front porch, the long verandahs and the exterior stairways, the facade is relatively unornamented. These architectural components should be preserved and the missing parts rebuilt. The parking requires regular upkeep, and the old concrete should be restored by specialists. The gables have a special texture which should be conserved; the same applies to the plaque indicating the date of construction. The fenestration determines the character of a building, and it is recommended that the damaged windows be repaired rather than replaced. Any windows that must be replaced should conform to the existing style in all respects.

All original entrances were on the facade, while the interior stairways were off the hotel lobby. Because the room corridors are dead-ends, exterior fire escape stairs had to be added at the end of each wing. In the general restoration of the building, current safety standards should be met with the least possible alteration of the original design. Modern mechanical systems should also be respectful and discreet.

The interior layout of the hotel is as originally designed. The common rooms are appealing and well lit. There is still a sink in each room. The building should be put to some use that will take full advantage of these features.

The old elements of interior trim such as wall panelling, plastered surfaces, woodwork, cast iron posts, and fireplace mantels require special upkeep. The old lighting fixtures enhance the period ambience and should remain in place. In terms of architectural type and layout, the First-class Hotel relates to the original First-class Hotel built in 1893, and is a modern concrete-walled version which exhibits few differences on the whole.

The First-class Hotel, the other detention hotels and the old laundry, taken together, represent a very significant facility. Consequently, the First-class Hotel is essential to the coherence of the set of buildings in this section of Grosse Île. The site has retained an air of bygone days, and any work undertaken to develop this national historic site should preserve the character of the site.

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

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Translation