

FHBRO Number 90-031 b

Grosse-Île, Quebec

### **Old Wash-house**

The Old Wash-house was constructed in 1855-56, and is associated with the first major period of occupation of Grosse-Île. The building plans were prepared by the Department of Public Works office in Québec. Used as a warehouse during the Second World War, the building now houses workshops and is owned by Agriculture Canada. See FHBRO Report No. 90-31 (Part I: 1832-1 860).

### **Reasons for Designation**

The Old Wash-house has been designated Classified because it is one of the best examples illustrating the themes of immigration and quarantine in Canada, and because its construction testifies to an important phase in the history of Grosse-Île. The quality of its aesthetic design is worthy of note. Moreover, its functional characteristics, workmanship and construction materials are considered to be excellent. Finally, its presence among the new detention hotels reinforces the current character of the site.

Starting in 1832, Grosse-Île was converted into a quarantine station for the Port of Québec, being the principal port of entry for immigrants arriving from Europe. Some new arrivals were carriers of the major epidemics spreading across North America at the time, and were detained on the island. After the quarantine station had been operating for several years on an improvised basis, the wash-house was built to provide better facilities for the immigrants during their period of detention. The Old Wash-house illustrates the provision of service buildings for the immigrants.

With its hip roof and several dormers, the Old Wash-house is one of the most elegant buildings on Grosse-Île. Its site on a cliff overlooking the St. Lawrence River and its interior layout and window arrangement were responses to specific requirements and illustrate the quality of its functional design. The quality of workmanship and the materials used are worthy of note, since the Old Wash-house has withstood the ravages of time despite being exposed to the brutal winds coming off the river.

The Old Wash-house is located in an area known as Cholera Bay. Still an integral part of a group of buildings originally reserved for healthy immigrants, it reinforces the current character of the western section of Grosse-Île.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Old Wash-house resides in its overall proportions, its roof style and window arrangement, and all the elements and components that attest to its functional design, workmanship, and appropriate choice of materials.

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This long wood structure boasts one of the few hip roofs on Grosse-Île. The dormers, with their fixed louvers, are a harmonious complement to the roof despite the fact that they do not appear on the original designs, but were added later. The north and south facades each have five regularly-spaced door bays, which contribute to the rhythmic composition.

The presence of these doors is consistent with the building's original role as a wash-house. The porches and stairways associated with these entrances no longer exist. Restoration should include rebuilding these elements. Inside, three of the original four large stoves and their chimneys have survived, and they also are evidence of the original role of the building. Preventive maintenance of the masonry chimneys and their bases is recommended.

The building was used for other purposes in the ensuing years, including a tinsmith's workshop and lavatory. Evidence of various modifications for these purposes (partitions, holes in the floor, air vents, etc.) could be preserved and included in an interpretation program.

The piers on which the building stands were an effective solution, the building being used mainly in summer. The same holds for the shape of the roof, which has withstood often windy conditions; the same cannot be said of all roofs on Grosse-Île. These important characteristics of the structure must be preserved.

Many of the materials used in the construction of the Old Wash-house are still in good condition. The limestone, locally-made brick, and the wood in the structure and exterior cladding were correctly selected and applied. The roof framing is undoubtedly the best example of this. The only exception is the north facade, where surfaces, whose deterioration has been accelerated by surface water, should be repaired.

The western section of Grosse-Île still contains buildings associated with the essential services formerly provided to healthy immigrants. With the Old Wash-house and the hotels—despite the demolition of some buildings—this sector still resembles a complex. Development of this national historic site should not alter its present character.

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

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