

FHBRO Number 90-31

Grosse Île, Quebec

The Upper Block (Sailors' Quarters (No. 39))

This multiple dwelling structure, better known as the "Upper Block", was built in 1905 from plans probably prepared by an architect from the Department of Public Works. This multiple dwelling structure, which initially housed the sailors and their families, is the property of the Department of Canadian Heritage and is part of the Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site. See FHBRO Building Report 90-31 (Part IV: 1901-1920).

Reasons for Designation

The Grosse Île multiple dwelling structure was designated Recognized because it is an essential element of the sector's current heritage character. This designation is also based on its architectural qualities.

The Upper Block, as the name suggests, is located in the western half of the island, near Cholera Bay. Without this visual landmark, this once bustling sector would be neglected and forgotten.

The aesthetic design of the multiple dwelling structure is based on the row houses or terraces popular in England from the mid-18th century onward. This type of plan made it possible to save space and materials, but produced long, narrow houses whose only source of light came from windows at the front and back.

This wooden building, which has a relatively classical decor, has undergone no major functional alterations. Although its present condition leaves something to be desired, this is due more to inadequate maintenance than a poor choice of building materials or techniques.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the Grosse Île multiple dwelling structure resides in its architecture, which is more classical than picturesque. The Upper Block is a long, wooden, two-and-a-half storey building topped with a pitched roof. To break the monotony of the facade, the eight dwellings were grouped into four blocks of two, according to the principle of row houses.

In each unit, the arrangement of openings is symmetrical, with the entrances (main and secondary) located in the middle. The facade is enlivened by a different treatment of

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the dormers. The middle dormers have a hipped roof, while those at the ends are large gable dormers decorated with wooden "fish scale" shingles. This stylistic refinement is not found on the rear elevation, which has three identical dormers located, like the double chimneys, in the axis of the demising walls. This architectural scheme is characterized by austerity and balance.

As in the case of military barracks, the choice of the type of construction used for this multiple dwelling structure was motivated by a desire to minimize costs. The framing is wood, as is the clapboard siding. The few decorative elements are the small pediment roofs above the entrances and the wooden "fish scale" shingles, which give the building a vernacular touch. It is unfortunate that the stairs and small verandahs attached to the entrances, as shown on the original plans, have been lost.

The sash windows play a very important role in the composition of the elevations. Should some of them have to be replaced, the new ones should faithfully reproduce the design and material of the originals. The same principle should apply for the replacement of the wooden siding. A return to wooden shingles for the cladding could eventually be considered.

This building houses eight separate and virtually identical units - the only difference is that the plan is reversed on either side of the demising wall. Each unit includes a living room and a kitchen on the ground floor and two bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. This layout, which follows the original location of the partitions and interior staircases, has not undergone any significant alterations.

Typical of turn-of-the-century domestic architecture, the panel doors, the fluted mantelpieces decorated with patera as well as the wide wooden plinths should be preserved. If the stair railing is restored, efforts should be made to preserve as much original material as possible. Some of the built-in furniture and plumbing fixtures could be used to illustrate a period interior.

Although the environment of the multiple dwelling structure has been changed over the years, it still retains a distinctive character. It would be desirable to locate the former access roads and restore the site's appearance to one more in keeping with its history. While the summer kitchens, which were attached structures, have disappeared, their traces remain along with those of other older structures. They could eventually be useful in improving our understanding of this sector known as Cholera Bay.

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

Translation
