

FHBRO Number 96-35

Montréal, Quebec

Clock Tower

Old Port of Montréal

The Clock Tower in the Old Port of Montréal was constructed in 1919-22 according to plans prepared by Paul Leclaire, an engineer. It is owned by Public Works and Government Services Canada and administered by the Société du Vieux-Port de Montréal, which converted it into a tourist interpretation centre in 1980. See FHBRO Report No. 96-35.

Reasons for Designation

The Clock Tower has been designated Classified because of its aesthetic quality, its considerable commemorative value, and its environmental importance.

The Clock Tower is an eloquent symbol of the importance of the Port of Montréal in the history of transportation in Canada. When the tower was built, Montréal handled more grain exports than any other port in the world and ranked second in North America in terms of total cargo. The Clock Tower recalls, as well, the major contribution of the port to the economic development of the city of Montréal.

The aesthetic significance of the Clock Tower resides in its elegant silhouette, the excellence of its composition, and in the judicious choice of decorative elements in the Beaux-Arts style. The design of the tower integrates in an ingenious fashion its role as a memorial, commemorating the courage of the seamen of the Merchant Marine who perished in the First World War, with its role as a clock tower. The structure also includes a curtain wall to conceal the grain sheds and conveyors, which were eventually demolished in the 1970s. The choice of a reinforced concrete structure with light masonry facing resulted from the need to minimize the weight of the monument on the wharf.

The Clock Tower is the focal point of the recent development of Victoria Pier, and young trees now stand where the old grain sheds once were. The tower is also a major landmark, and it is pictured in the logo of the Old Port of Montréal.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Clock Tower resides in its distinctive silhouette, the type of construction used, elements related to its various uses, and its many ornamental details. Its heritage character also resides in its association with its immediate surroundings and the Port.

The memorial consists of a principal tower, a smaller tower, and a curtain wall linking the two.

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The 45-metre principal tower is built on a square base. The lower part of each of its four elevations is different. The entrance is on the east facade; the memorial is on the north facade; the west facade is adorned with pilasters; and the south wall, which was formerly concealed by the grain sheds, shows signs of an old opening. A careful study of the decorative façade which marks the entrance should be carried out. The commemorative elements (the plaque, the granite block unveiled by the Prince of Wales, and the two cannons in front) require regular maintenance.

The composition of the upper part of the tower is highly ordered. The four backlit clock faces are near the top. An ensemble of decorative elements in the Beaux-Arts style is found on three sides of the tower, immediately below the clock. The south elevation features several rectangular openings arranged in an irregular pattern. The columns at each corner and the smooth walls accentuate the tower's vertical thrust. An eagle sits atop each concrete column; pillars and small pediments complete the scheme. A pinnacle, which was recently converted to an observation deck, crowns the composition. These elements should be preserved.

It is important to preserve the thrusting silhouette of the tower and any original material that remains. It is recommended that no finishing materials be applied that would alter the exterior appearance, diminish the clarity of the bas-reliefs, or obscure the joints between the masonry blocks. Repairs to the concrete frame and foundations will require specialists with experience in the restoration of old structures. Some ornamental details in artificial stone should be repaired or replaced. The specialists assigned to this task should consult the original plans and specifications, which describe the methods of fabrication specified by the designer, among other things. Replacement elements should be similar to the originals in form, material and texture. The original colour of the tower could be determined by stratigraphic analysis.

The small tower provides a counterpoint to the main tower aesthetically as well as in terms of the structure. Its corners are treated as pilasters which support the decorative volutes above. The lower portions of the visible sides are decorated with a pillar sitting atop guilloched pilasters. It is recommended that the necessary repairs be made according to the conditions specified above for the main tower.

The curtain wall, linked to the main tower by an expansion joint, must remain in place and must be treated with the same care as the other parts of the monument.

A program of ongoing maintenance designed to extend the life of the Clock Tower should include the inspection of joints and caulking for water-tightness, and the testing of the efficiency of the flashings. Any replacement flashings should conform to the original style and materials. The tower interior, which formerly housed only the clock

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mechanism, was not finished with a specified material. It is recommended that the structural elements and custom-made masonry blocks be left exposed as the designer intended. The clock faces and mechanism are important heritage elements, and they should be serviced and maintained only by specialists.

As a memorial, the tower should be used only for purposes befitting its character. The arrangement of trees in rows to evoke the old sheds and conveyors, are a significant exterior element which should be preserved, as should the highly visible siting of the tower, which is a symbol of the Old Port of Montréal. The massive concrete pillars which indicate the location of the commemorative plaque on the north wall, are part of the original memorial and should be preserved.

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Translation