
FHBRO Number 95-077

Ottawa, Ontario

Main Greenhouse Range (Building 50)

Central Experimental Farm

The Main Greenhouse Range (Building 50), a series of interconnected structures, was built in stages between 1915 and c.1967. The complex has had several designers: Pierson U-bar Company for the c.1915 range of greenhouses; the Department of Public Works under R.C. Wright for Greenhouse 11 (c.1923); and Lord and Burnham for the former Palm House, c.1938-39. Some of the post World War II pre-manufactured greenhouses may also have been supplied by Lord and Burnham. The east/west headerhouse, c.1960s, was designed by Burgess, McLean and MacPhadyen, Architects with the Department of Public Works under E.A. Gardiner. Modifications over the years reflect the functional needs of researchers, and include 1940s additions on the north and west sides, the 1960s additions on the south side of the complex, as well as the minor modifications to improve accessibility at the entrance to the former Palm House. The greenhouse ranges have maintained their original research function and now also accommodate public events. The building is a component of the Central Experimental Farm, a National Historic Site. Agriculture Agri-Food Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 95-077.

Reasons For Designation

The Main Greenhouse Range (Building 50) has been designated Recognized because of its environmental significance and its architectural importance, as well as its historical associations.

The low scale and massing of the Main Greenhouse Range contribute to the park-like setting of the central core of functional, science and administration buildings, within the Central Experimental Farm. The overall relationship of the greenhouses to the adjacent buildings and open lawns remains largely unchanged. The prominent location of the greenhouses contributes to their familiarity among local visitors.

The Main Greenhouse Range is distinguished by its function-driven design and layout of greenhouses, headerhouses and utility units, and by its evolution over time to accommodate the changing needs of the plant research program. The majority of the complex is utilitarian and modular in design, varying only in wall heights and roof pitch, reflecting the simple building program and limitations of the steel, aluminum and glass construction. The pattern of metal mullions separating glazed panels in the roofs and walls adds visual interest and texture, while the complex's central octagonal-plan Palm House provides a major focus for the public side of the greenhouses located on the east side of the headerhouse.

These structures are directly associated with the Central Experimental Farm's role of

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conducting research and disseminating results to farmers across the nation. They are also related to the Dominion-wide system of experimental farms used to promote the latest agricultural practices across Canada.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Main Greenhouse Range (Building 50) resides in its overall massing and evolutionary form, profile, construction materials and site relationships.

The massing of the Main Greenhouse Range is characterized by single-storey gable-roofed greenhouses attached perpendicularly to an “L” shaped spine of single-storey flat-roofed headerhouses. The massing, roof profiles and footprint reflect internal functions. The clarity of this expression should be respected. Character-defining features include the repetitive rhythms of the gabled roofs, the curved eaves, the two ogee-shaped roofs over the east entrances, and the generally consistent massing, scale and proportion of the greenhouses. The Palm House, an octagonal one-and-a-half storey hip-roofed greenhouse on the east side, is a focus of the massing.

The greenhouses are built on concrete foundations with partial-height concrete block walls, and consist of glass set within wood or metal frames. Details are characteristically simple, with the repetitive module, the scale of the vertical mullions and the character of the glazing providing pattern and texture. In contrast with the majority of the complex, the Palm House reflects a greater attention to detail, with its elegant radiused eaves, heavier wood framing with decorative profiles, and vestibule detailing which includes a simple cornice supported by pilasters, panelled and glazed wood entrance doors, and a radiating mullioned transom. A similarly detailed entrance vestibule is located on Greenhouse 11. The metal, wood and masonry materials should have a regular maintenance program. The modular design, relative transparencies of materials and strong rectangular patterns should be respected.

The functional interior planning of the complex is characterized by open, interior volumes and axial planning. Mechanisms related to the functioning of greenhouses and simple interior finishes such as headerhouse masonry walls, concrete floors and glazed walls and ceilings in the greenhouses contribute to the deliberately utilitarian, functional character. They should be maintained.

The character of the setting is appropriately park-like yet utilitarian, with a simple, manicured treatment of the surrounding turfgrass, perimeter walkways and minor foundation planting along the east side of the complex.

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

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