

Collège Militaire Royal Officers' Mess
Building #5
Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Collège Militaire Royal Officer's Mess, designated CMR #5, was built in 1839 to designs prepared by Major Thomas Foster of the Royal Engineers under the supervision of Colonel Oldfield. The building is the property of the Department of National Defence. See FHBRO Building Report No. 86-73.

Reasons for Designation

CMR #5 was designated Recognized for its historical associations, its architectural significance, and its environmental values.

The building is one of a group of buildings constructed within the walls of Fort Saint-Jean in 1839 in an effort to improve the district's defenses following the 1837-38 rebellion. Fort Saint-Jean remained an important military centre for the stationing of troops and supplies, as evinced by the construction of this large, permanent military building.

CMR #5 structure is associated with two important periods in the growth of Saint-Jean. During the period of its construction, Saint-Jean was an important point in the trade routes by rail, water, and road between Montreal and the United States. Its change in function in 1952 signaled the initiation of Canada's third (and only bilingual) military college.

One of four two-storey, hip-roofed, red brick structures on stone foundations, similar in design, construction and materials, the building is an important contributor to the character of the group. It employs simplified vernacular forms influenced by British Classicism - rigid symmetry, rectangular forms, and classical proportions. CMR #5 is the largest and architecturally most sophisticated of this group.

Though several of the building's original ancillary structures have been removed and the once-grassed square has been paved over for parking, CMR #5 has retained its relationship with surrounding buildings. CMR#5 also helps to define and sustain the mid-19th century character of the site within the earthen ramparts, in the face of the establishment of the 1933 federal military training centre and the 1952 Collège Militaire Royal.

The heritage value of CMR #5 resides primarily in its simple form and proportions, its rigid symmetry, and the materials employed in the original building.

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Character Defining Elements

The building is a simple, classically influenced, two storey, hipped-roof form, "H"-shaped in plan. Its main characteristics include a lack of decorative elements, regularly spaced openings for doors and windows, and projecting end pavilions.

The foundations and trim are of dressed stone and the walls are of irregularly sized brick laid in common bond. Flat arches span the window openings.

The coherence of the original exterior design of the building has been altered in an unsympathetic manner by numerous changes to the openings and re-orientation of the building from the river to the courtyard. Those alterations which respect the proportions and rhythms of the original openings should be retained. Alterations which have altered the visual balance of the building's exterior should be addressed during future work on the building.

The interior of CMR #5 has been much altered since construction. Future renovation design work should include investigations to identify surviving elements of historic plan and detailing for incorporation into designs.

In planning future changes to CMR #5, to adjacent buildings, and to the site, it is important to maintain the integrity of the existing spatial and landscape relations. If parking needs can be met by alternative means, consideration should be given to the landscaping of the original square.

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