

Chronicle
#5

HISTORICAL RALLY

THE PORT AND THE GREAT PANDEMICS OF PAST CENTURIES

Advances in Grosse-Île and the Immigration Hospital (Hôpital du Parc Savard) 1897-1958

With all the major modernizations carried out at Grosse-Île through 1894, changing the face of the station, Montizambert gave new meaning to the very idea of public health. By the end of the century, this station in the St. Lawrence River ranked among the top quarantine stations in the world.

Hôpital de l'Immigration, 1908



Source: John Woodruff/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada/PA-117288

Immigration Hospital, 1908

Source: John Woodruff/Library and Archives Canada/PA-117288

It was in August 1897 that the Immigration Hospital, popularly known as the Parc Savard Hospital, opened some distance from inhabited

areas near the Saint Charles River. It was mainly intended to receive sick immigrants. Under federal jurisdiction, this establishment also treated other types of clientele: contagious soldiers during both world wars, indigenous people in the 1940s as well as sick or injured sailors. The hospital also periodically served as a quarantine station.

In 1899, Frederick Montizambert left Grosse-Île for Ottawa where he was appointed senior government adviser on public health by Minister of the Interior Sydney Fisher. He continued to preside over the development of Grosse-Île through the new quarantine superintendent, Dr. Georges-Élie Martineau.

In the early 1920s, the government decided that individuals suffering from benign illnesses who were dropped off at Grosse-Île would be transferred to a section of the Immigration Hospital in Québec City that was set up for the purpose. The station's medical equipment followed to the hospital when the quarantine station in Grosse-Île closed in 1937. Later, midway through the Second World War, the hospital opened a tuberculosis wing.

At the end of the 1950s, the hospital was abandoned until the provincial government bought it back in 1960. Three years later, the Immigration Hospital was rechristened Hôpital du Christ-Roi (Christ King Hospital) and its vocation changed from a federal hospital for the contagious and immigrants to a general hospital.



Another intense period for Grosse-Île: 1901-1914



Source: ca 1890, J.E.Livernois, Saint-Luc-de-la-Grosse-Île, MNBAQ, 2009_177

At the turn of the century, there was a new wave of sick travelers with an average of 542 treated each year between 1901 and 1914. In 1914, nearly 800 patients were treated.

Note that the Port of Québec welcomed an average of 55,000 people from 1901 to 1905. That number jumped to a record 186,000 in 1911 to 1914. The number of hospitalizations ranging from 800 to 900 on Grosse-Île exceeded its capacity. In addition, cholera struck again, overshadowing scarlet fever, diphtheria, enteric fever, measles, smallpox and many other diseases.

This forced the government to undertake major work at Grosse-Île. First, the main wharf was extended 200 feet which allowed large ships to dock and let off passengers. Previously, the station's smaller boats had been unable to approach the transatlantic vessels in rough waters.



Source: 1914av, Livernois, View from Grosse-Île, BAC, Pa-23846 mikan332173



Source: 1910av, D.S. McLaughlin, Second class hotel, BAC, C-79029 mikan3623686

A large, modern two-storey hotel was built for travelers, but shipping companies soon requisitioned it to accommodate first class passengers. Second class had to lodge in a twenty-year-old hotel.



Houses for employees, residences for doctors and nurses, a bakery, a water tower and a concrete hotel that could accommodate 252 third class travelers were also built. A new laboratory was constructed near the hospital, providing better and quicker disease testing and earlier treatment for patients.



Source: ANC, PA-010221, Immigrants à Québec, 1911 In front of immigrant facilities on Louise Pier in Québec City.

Makeshift hangars and tents were still needed to house the sick who complained about the poor facilities. Construction therefore began on a new concrete hospital, but World War I halted work and the building was not completed until 1915.

War

The number of immigrants dropped considerably during the war of 1914-1918. Dr. Montizambert was in Ottawa, waiting for the war to end before resuming construction of the sanitary facilities on Grosse-Île. Knowing that hygienic efforts would be neglected during the war, he expected the worst while anticipating new growth in immigration.



Source: Photo APQ, Highlanders 48th Battalion embarking, Pointe-à-Carcy, 1914

Unsurprisingly, in 1918, returning soldiers carried with them the Spanish flu sweeping across Europe. Many died and Dr. Montizambert called for resumption of construction. Despite his insistence, the expense was considered unjustified in times of war. In fact, since 1912, the Pointe-au-Père station (where the Saint Lawrence River pilots were stationed at the time) played an increasingly important role within the river's quarantine infrastructure. Its medical resources were growing, and inspections were now being conducted from Pointe-au-Père to Grosse-Île, saving precious time. The useless and lengthy detention of transatlantic vessels was being contested more than ever, especially since the Parc Savard hospital for immigrants sick with contagious diseases was now open in Québec City, as we saw earlier.

In the early 1920s, the government agreed that individuals suffering from minor illnesses who landed on Grosse Île would instead be sent to the Parc Savard Hospital.



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At the time, a specific section of the hospital was set up for this purpose. In addition, when the quarantine at Grosse Île closed in 1937, the station's medical equipment was transported to the hospital. Then, in the middle of the Second World War, a tuberculosis wing was specially dedicated to this clientele.

At the end of the 1950s, the hospital was abandoned for a time before being bought back by the provincial government in 1960. Three years later, what had been the Immigration Hospital became the Christ the King Hospital. As a result, its vocation changed from a federal hospital for immigrants and infectious diseases to a general hospital.

You are now able to answer question 9 of the Quiz, to be eligible for the draw.

See the decline of Grosse-Île and its change of vocation in the next chronicle.