



Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site of Canada

As the Port of Québec's quarantine station, this site made it possible to fight the introduction of epidemics to the country



Grosse Île
© Parks Canada

Île aux Grues Archipelago, Quebec, Canada

BACKGROUND

Starting in 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, many people left England, Ireland and Scotland to start a new life in North America. The city of Québec was by far the largest port of entry into Canada. During the 1820s, an average of 15,000 immigrants a year, two thirds of them Irish, arrived here.

This immigration towards the St. Lawrence soon coincided with an outbreak of cholera in Europe.

In 1832, reports that that this terrible plague would soon reach the St. Lawrence Valley prompted the authorities to immediately establish a quarantine station on Grosse Île, an island in the middle of the river, 48 km downstream of Québec. From 1832 to 1834, this station dealt with cholera, then launched itself into a difficult battle against typhus in 1847. Most of the victims of the typhus epidemic were Irish immigrants. Six out of seven of the approximately 100,000 people who arrived in Québec in 1847 were Irish.

During its 105 years of existence, the port of Québec's quarantine station welcomed immigrants of over 42 different nationalities.

These people arrived from all over Europe, seeking a better future.

At Grosse Île, doctors would board the ships to perform medical inspections of the passengers. Until 1893, passengers who got off at Grosse Île had to air out and wash their belongings, as well as washing themselves. The year 1893 was marked by the institution of scientific disinfection procedures, both for belongings and for people.

The First World War (1914-1918) and the Great Depression (1929) drastically reduced the number of people immigrating to Canada. Starting in 1923, the Grosse Île medical team cared for severe infections such as cholera, plague, yellow fever, typhus, and smallpox. The Grosse Île quarantine station closed permanently in 1937.

Grosse Île became an experimental facility for research on bacterial warfare by the Department of Defence (1942), then housed the division of veterinary pathology (1956) and Agriculture Canada's animal quarantine station (1965). Grosse Île was designated a national historic site in 1974.



Immigrant family
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REASONS FOR NATIONAL HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site of Canada commemorates the significance of immigration to Canada, especially via the gateway of Québec, from the early 19th century until the First World War. Grosse Île also commemorates the tragedies experienced here by Irish immigrants, particularly during the typhus epidemic of 1847. Finally, the site commemorates the part the island played, from 1832 to 1937, as the quarantine station for the port of Québec, long the main port of entry for immigrants to Canada.

Québec Field Unit: *Commemorative Integrity Statement: Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site of Canada*, 1998, p. 3.

MILESTONES

- 1829** Second cholera pandemic begins in Europe.
- 1820-1830** Among English, Irish, and Scottish immigrants to Quebec, approximately two thirds are Irish.
- 1832** Grosse Île quarantine station opens.
- 1847** Great Famine in Ireland and typhus epidemic.
- 1867** The Canadian government formulates a comprehensive policy on immigration and settlement, requiring the establishment of a reliable, efficient quarantine station.
- 1893** The disinfection building opens and the station is modernized.
- 1914** The First World War and the Great Depression reduce the number of immigrants to Canada.
- 1923** The Grosse Île medical team treats severe cases of contagious disease.
- 1937** The Grosse Île quarantine station closes permanently.
- 1942** The Canadian Department of Defence sets up an experimental facility for research on biological warfare on Grosse Île.
- 1956** The Grosse Île facilities are transferred to Agriculture Canada. The Division of Veterinary Pathology is housed there.
- 1965** The same department sets up an animal quarantine station on the island.
- 1974** Grosse Île is officially recognized as a national historic site of Canada.

LOCATION

The Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site of Canada is located in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, in the Île aux Grues Archipelago, 48 km downstream from Québec.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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