

The Montreal Sailors' Institute and the Homosexual Sailor:  
A Model for Moral Reform in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries



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Temporary housing has historically been an issue for the transient sailor in port, who often found shelter in uncomfortable boarding houses, and sometimes in saloons and brothels. In nineteenth-century Montreal this situation became a public concern when the philanthropic, upper classes involved themselves in finding a solution for the sailors. Funds were raised from citizens and a large Victorian-style hotel was purchased in 1898 to establish a permanent home for the sailors in port. The greater numbers of sailors coming into Montreal over the next fifty years would prompt the Sailors' Institute to raise more money from citizens so that they could construct a modern building that could boast a increased number of single bedrooms for the men. The forms and functions of these homes were constructed in response to the unfavourable reputation of sailors, who were thought to engage in a number of moral vices and social deviances such as excessive drinking and promiscuous hetero- and homosexual sex. Both of the Sailors' Institute buildings, Victorian and modern, represented a "socio-spatial dialectic," or an interactive space "in which people make places and places make people."<sup>1</sup> These temporary residences, constructed as familial homes that would promote moral sensibility and decency, sought to reform the sailors' behaviour through symbolic domestic and institutional forms, as well as functions and interactions based on the heterosexual family unit.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Montreal had become one of the foremost ports in Canada. The men and few women who worked on ships were seen as the backbone of Montreal's urban growth, supplying the city with imports and exporting a number of manufactured goods. For centuries, the sailor's occupation has been a male-dominated field, and

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaró, "Things, Flows, Filters, Tactics," in *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, ed. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaró (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2002) 5.

its gender associations were strengthened in the last two hundred years by Enlightenment science that stressed binary opposition between the sexes. While women were perceived as passive, frail, irrational, and thus better suited to tending to private sphere of the home, men were to play the alternate role of a strong, active worker in the public world.<sup>2</sup> It was partly because of the image of sailors as adventurous labourers, along with their short stints in port that were often associated with random hetero- and homosexual encounters, that they became highly sexualized figures in society.<sup>3</sup> A history of homoeroticism conceptualizes port cities as part of an Atlantic cultural web where, along with commerce, ships also brought "seamen familiar with the contemporary sexual issues and sexual cultures of their home ports."<sup>4</sup>

To address the same-sex relationships and experiences of the sailors I will be using the term "homosexual," which appeared with the rise of medical and sexual sciences early in the twentieth century. In the period preceding this, terms like "sodomy", "buggery", "sex perversion" and "sexual immorality" were commonly used to describe sex between men.<sup>5</sup> Sodomy vaguely grouped together all non-reproductive sex, and was not seen as a "homosexual" offence until the emergence of capitalist society. The oppression of gays and lesbians over the preceding centuries in Western Christian culture and the prohibition of non-reproductive sexual activity became embedded in the social and moral order, until this oppression "came to be viewed by ruling

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, "Introduction," in *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920*, ed. Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) ix

<sup>3</sup> Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Clare A. Lyons, "Mapping an Atlantic Sexual Culture: Homoeroticism in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," in *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York; London: New York UP, 2007) 166.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987) 65.

groups as necessary to the maintenance of class, gender, and State power."<sup>6</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the category of the homosexual that had emerged in Europe was adopted, psychoanalyzed, and policed in Canada.

National agencies in America and Britain in the nineteenth century sponsored "sailor homes" in ports where "wandering men could reacquaint themselves with domestic virtues such as neatness, temperance, and providence."<sup>7</sup> The Montreal Sailors' Institute was modeled on these homes, and intended to solve the "problems of the sailor in port," which included what Victorian society considered the most offensive and disruptive moral vices: drinking and promiscuous sex.<sup>8</sup> The large numbers of sailors on the streets provoked anxiety among the urban elites, a group of people who shaped the city in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by founding cultural institutions and charitable organizations.<sup>9</sup> By the 1860s, a number of these upper-middle class men and women began involving themselves in the work of Reverend Father Osgood, who worked with sailors from a succession of temporary locations. This transient home was not seen as the best way to influence the men, and so these men and women established a building fund to purchase a permanent residence.

Funds were donated to this cause by both Montreal citizens and steamship companies,<sup>10</sup> and the Montreal Sailors' Institute purchased its first building in 1898 at 352 Place Royale in the

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<sup>6</sup> Kinsman 38.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret S. Creighton, "Davy Jones' Locker Room: Gender and the American Whaleman, 1830-1870," in *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920*, ed. Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 134.

<sup>8</sup> Darcy Ingram, "Saving the Union's Jack: The Montreal Sailors' Institute and the Homeless Sailor, 1862-98," in *Negotiating Identities in 19th and 20th Century Montreal*, ed. Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005) 49.

<sup>9</sup> Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers, "Introduction," in *Negotiating Identities in 19th and 20th Century Montreal*, ed. Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005) 1.

<sup>10</sup> Benefactors and funds donated are listed in an Accounting file at the Mariner's House archives.

port. Fundraising would sustain the Sailors' Institute throughout its existence, and donations from the community and shipping companies were so generous that it allowed the Institute to both purchase this initial building, and build a new one in 1953. Although the building was designed specifically to house sailors, because of its charitable funding and non-profit services the Sailors' Institute can be considered a public building and organization. In the beginning, fundraising efforts drew upon the social concern of sailors in the port, promoting that it was for the public good to establish an institute to keep these disruptive figures off the streets.<sup>11</sup> Following World War II, the institute would ask for funds to construct a new building based upon the contribution of the Merchant Marines to the war effort; this time, the new institute building was promoted as a permanent monument to those who passed away fighting for England and Canada.<sup>12</sup> Although the public was involved in the creation and funding of almost all of the Institute's building projects and operations, the actual structure and function of the Sailors' Institute relied upon the construction of a private, domestic space, cut off from what were considered the evils and corrupting influences of urban society.<sup>13</sup>

The Sailors' Institute prided itself on being open to men of "all creeds and nationalities."<sup>14</sup> The sexual orientation of the men, however, was never addressed. The secrecy of men involved in what were then seen as deviant sexual activities, along with the administrators' silence to

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<sup>11</sup> William Henry Atherton, *The History of the Catholic Sailors' Club of Montreal: Historical Souvenir, 1893-1924* (Montreal: s.n., 1925) 6-42.

<sup>12</sup> Newspaper advertisements and articles placed in the Gazette during this period solicited donations to help build a permanent monument to the sailors. The new building was often described as a "practical and permanent memorial" to the sailors (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1945*, 10).

<sup>13</sup> Ingram 49-59.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Alexander, "Montreal Sailors' Institute," in *Montreal Sailors' Institute: Thirty-Sixth Annual Report, 1897* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1898) 5.

maintain the good reputation of the Sailors' Institute, may be responsible for the lack of accounts of any homosexual activity at the institute. By pairing the history of the British Merchant Navy ships that frequented the Montreal port as an increasingly safe space for homosexuality by the middle of the twentieth-century, and the Sailors' Institute as a space for moral reform, one can infer that this was one moral vice that the institute sought to reform among this group of "lonely sailors."<sup>15</sup> In spite of the repression of this narrative in the Institute's history, I intend to reveal the rules that governed the Sailors' Institute's constructions, reading the architecture for its attempts to instill moral values in sailors through style, room decorations, and activities that imposed appropriate mixed and same gender behaviour and interactions.<sup>16</sup> One scholarly paper has been published on the topic of the Montreal Sailor's Institute: Darcy Ingram's essay, "Saving the Union's Jack: The Montreal Sailors' Institute and the Homeless Sailor, 1862-98." Ingram discusses the activities and moral implications of the Institute and the role of Montreal's urban elite in its creation, examining the ways a moral and nurturing space was created for the men. I will be focusing more closely on the ways the architecture specifically interacted with these moral forces, with a specific focus on homosexuality and the normalizing effects that this home was meant to have.

The first home for the sailors was in the Victorian building named the Montreal House (Fig. 1). Originally a Georgian-style hotel built in the early Victorian period, the building was later remodeled with classical Victorian decoration. Its original decoration included pilasters on the first storey, and stringcourses on top of the first and third storeys. The classical decoration

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<sup>15</sup> *Annual Reports* from the Institute often refer to the men as "lonely sailors", lacking the intimacy of their wives and "sweethearts" at home.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1998) 491.

added later in the Victorian period included pediments on the top storey that featured circular windows surrounded by decoration, as well as a domed cupola on the building's corner complete with extended half-round windows separated by small pilasters. The classical style of architecture, even in its decorative elements, was seen to impose an air of respectability "on all kinds of buildings."<sup>17</sup> The imposition of these design elements onto the building represents classicism's "hierarchy of decorum," which states that, "the degree of stateliness and the amount of decoration should reflect the status of the client."<sup>18</sup> Merchant sailors were a definitively working-class population, but as an essential component of the capitalist system that sustained the British Empire and early national Canada, they were often given special status and recognition. This design for their "home" thus gave the public the sense of stability and respectability that the bourgeois class themselves valued so much,<sup>19</sup> and brought the sailors into the fold of middle-class respectability.<sup>20</sup>

As visible evidence of social status, ornament in the Victorian period gave many people "innocent pleasure," but it was also believed to conceal "the crude facts and aberrant lusts of human nature."<sup>21</sup> This imposition of stateliness and the repression of lust and desire is a spatial tactic that removes the sexuality of the human body in order to present to the Montreal public an image of the sailor as a well-mannered member of society. As members of the lower-classes sailors were considered unthinking, physical "doers," associated with menial work and nature.

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<sup>17</sup> John Gloag, *Victorian Taste: Some Social Aspects of Architecture and Industrial Design, from 1820-1900* (Wiltshire, Great Britain: Redwood Press, 1962) 101-2.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Dixon, *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 17-8.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Harling, *Home: A Victorian Vignette* (London, Constable, 1938) 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ingram 52.

<sup>21</sup> Gloag, 136.

The middle-class, male-defined view of sexuality constructed an image of young, working-class men as not only more erotic, but also indifferent to homosexual behaviour.<sup>22</sup> Through the upper classes' imposition of deviant sexuality, the working classes came to be seen as a threat to society, with the potential to disrupt the state's model for capital accumulation that was based on the heterosexual family unit consisting of the male breadwinner and the wife "dedicated to raising future productive Canadians."<sup>23</sup> The reformation of the sailor's non-normative sexuality was thus seen to be necessary in order to preserve the stability and productivity of society.

While the Victorian era continued into the early twentieth-century, the First World War brought so many changes in society that when it was finally over, "everything with a Victorian air" including ideas, morality, furniture, and architecture, seemed dubious or out of date.<sup>24</sup>

Victorian tastes and aesthetics were replaced with a growing pre-occupation with rationality and reason, which were reinforced by technological breakthroughs, and sustained by the concept of "modernity."<sup>25</sup> Modernism in architecture sought to remove all associations with the past, and previous forms and decorations were dismissed in favour of simplified forms. The increasing influence of modernism was reflected in the exterior of the Sailors' Institute over the next fifty-five years, which saw the removal of many decorative elements. In 1908, the Institute underwent renovations that included an addition on its right wing, an observatory on the roof, as well as the removal of one of the building's classical pediments (Fig. 2). In an attempt to simplify the

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<sup>22</sup> Kinsman 44-5.

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Strange, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 9.

<sup>24</sup> John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830-1900* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1961) xv.

<sup>25</sup> Penny Sparke, *As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (London; San Francisco: Pandora, 1995) 73.



building, further renovations had removed the cupola and the observatory in an attempt to make the building more simplified, to approximate a more modern form (Fig. 3).

The number of sailors coming into port continued to increase, and by 1940 the Sailors' Institute could no longer accommodate the growing demand. In the midst of the Second World War, the Institute's Board of Directors commissioned architect C.R. Tetley to draw up plans for a new building. After years of fundraising, construction on the building began in April 1953, and was completed one year later (Fig. 4). While the new building stands in the original plot of the former institute, its orientation to the street was completely changed by placing the main entrance on Place d'Youville, facing the water, instead of its former entrance position that faced Place Royale square. The design of the new building is representative of the modernist tradition in architecture that had been popularized by the middle of the twentieth-century. The building still stands today as a four-storey brick building with a very simple exterior; it is three bays wide, with a slightly raised middle bay, and rows of windows that run continuously around the building. The pattern of brickwork on the first storey is reminiscent of the rusticated stone treatment that is associated with Roman and Renaissance architecture styles. This allusion to a less functional building feature is the closest approximation to a decorative treatment that can be identified.

A comparison of the Institute's architectural styles reveals a discourse based on notions of gendered associations, and their interaction with a building's occupants. Forms and meanings in the modern style were based on values of rationality, science and technology, which historically had male associations.<sup>26</sup> Early drawings for the new building did allow some classically

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<sup>26</sup> Sparke 74.

influenced decoration on the exterior, such as pilasters, a decorative entrance, and patterns formed with the brick cladding,<sup>27</sup> but this proposed ornamentation did not make it to the final form of the building. The "masculine cultural paradigm"<sup>28</sup> of modernist design is apparent on the final exterior of the new institute where all associations with the former exterior's decoration were absent. By the 1950s, homosexual men had also become associated with "femininity" in Quebec society, referred to by names such as "fifi" which mean "effeminé."<sup>29</sup> The building as it appears today shows a stylistic attempt to "masculinize" the exterior of the space through the removal of all decorative elements that came to be associated with "femininity", simultaneously removing these associations from the male occupants of the residence as well.

Although attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe and North America began to relax in the 1950s,<sup>30</sup> according to Paul Baker and Jo Stanley in their book *Hello Sailor! A Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea*, the ships of the Merchant Navy at this time were the only place where gay seafarers could be open about their sexuality.<sup>31</sup> This secure environment did not have a counterpart on the shores of Montreal, and the transition period for the City following World War II revealed increasingly conservative attitudes towards sexuality. Mayor Camillien Houde's "Ville ouverte" policy, where nightclubs, brothels and gambling joints were "wide open" came to a dramatic close when Jean Drapeau won the election for mayor on a platform of morality.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This included an early drawing by architect C.R. Tetley for the proposed new building, published in 1945 in the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1945*: 10. Held at the Mariner's House archives.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Ross Higgins and Line Chamberland, "Mixed Messages: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Yellow Press in Quebec and Ontario during the 1950s-1960s," in *The Challenge of modernity: Post-Confederation Canada*, ed. Ian McKay (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1992) 426.

<sup>30</sup> Baker and Stanley 29.

<sup>31</sup> Baker and Stanley ix.

<sup>32</sup> Higgins and Chamberland 422.

Drapeau was elected in 1954, the same year the modern facility opened to the sailors, and he too would promote modern renewal in the city with large-scale building projects and the clearance of older buildings to clean up areas both aesthetically and morally. Although religious interpretation had become unfashionable, the connection between architecture and morality did not end with the Victorian period, and the belief that architecture expressed social, moral, and philosophical conditions was certainly noticeable at this time. The perception of architecture as "an instrument for the attainment of social policy employed to achieve 'moral' ends"<sup>33</sup> endured into the modern period, and in many ways became strengthened through its utopian rhetoric.

By the 1950s, a visible gay culture was emerging in Montreal that centered around gay bars in the west, downtown, and in the port.<sup>34</sup> This strong undercurrent of homosexual activity prompted a stylistic approach to the new building that was distinctly institutional, influenced by the architectural forms of educational facilities and hospital designs of the period. References to hospital architecture reflected the professional and popular opinion in Canada at this time that sexual deviance was a mental illness, replacing its former stigma as simply criminal behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Stylistic references to school architecture were also significant since the Canadian school system had become instrumental in "making citizens", through negotiating questions of gender, sex, and the body.<sup>36</sup> The new Institute presented to the Montreal public was thus a model that suggested the treatment of the illness of sexual deviance, as well as re-educating the sailors in the ways of

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<sup>33</sup> David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture Revisited* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ross Higgins, "Des lieux d'appartenance: les bars gais des années 1950," in *Sortir de L'Ombre: Histoires des Communautés Lesbienne et Gaie de Montréal*, ed. Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 1998) 108-115.

<sup>35</sup> Nancy Renwick, "No Fury Like A Homosexual Scorned: Murder, Mental Illness and Shifting Perceptions of Homosexuality in Canada, 1958-1959" (Masters thesis., Concordia University, 1999) 4.

<sup>36</sup> Kinsman 8.

social and moral sensibility. Although associations with state models and institutions were now used in the place of the domesticity of the former building on the exterior, a domestic atmosphere and its codes of behaviour would continue on the interior of the building.

Housing the sailors was an important social and political project as the temporarily homeless sailors had become associated with the "disorder, unrest, and conflict in the social system."<sup>37</sup> Numerous accounts of sailors in the port describe them chronically loitering and drinking, and since both of these offences were increasingly associated with homosexuality through the act of "cruising" for male sexual partners, it was believed that the sailors needed to be reintegrated into a domestic sphere that could positively influence them. This separation between the potentially corrupting public sphere and the domestic private sphere became a gendered division that began in early modern Europe. Under the emerging capitalist system, men were required to enter the public domain to earn money while women stayed at home and tended to the domestic sphere. This distinction between "feminine" and "masculine" spaces became more defined and entrenched with the industrialization of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries in Europe and North America. The rapid industrialization and increase of people in cities also saw public space increasingly associated with chaos and disorder, a situation that inspired the distinct separation of public and private spheres with special importance placed on the comfort and sanctuary of the home.<sup>38</sup>

While some rooms in the old Victorian building for the Sailors' Institute had the appearance of a men's social clubs, one of the goals in offering the sailors this private space was

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<sup>37</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996), reprinted in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 402.

<sup>38</sup> Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York; London: The Guildford Press, 2001) 3-5.

to help them overcome their homosocial culture through the social construction of a home "that would reflect middle-class domestic values,"<sup>39</sup> and in turn "direct social relations" accordingly.<sup>40</sup> Since gender and sexuality "involve social relations that extend across and are shaped by space,"<sup>41</sup> this approach looked past the body and used structures and spaces that were socially normative to influence the men. To make this construction of a domestic space successful, the introduction of a sense of family through the inclusion of women was seen to be necessary. The roles of women in the Institute reflected those of mothers in Victorian society, who were responsible for the moral and spiritual guidance of their families.<sup>42</sup> Women took care of the men by visiting them in the hospital, offering them counseling when they were in trouble, as well as the creation of the home itself by raising money for the new buildings and decorating them. The men had become part of the private, feminine domestic sphere that would protect them from the outside world "where music and intoxicants are dispensed and poor Jack is lured to his ruin."<sup>43</sup>

Many women at the Institute were involved in the Women's Auxiliary Committee, a group responsible for organizing the fundraising initiatives, and for furnishing rooms in order to create a proper home for the sailors. As a sanctuary, the Victorian home was fashioned for men as a place of refuge from the overbearing capitalism of the public sphere.<sup>44</sup> Women created more than an escape, however, as the environment of the home that was meant to actively shape

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<sup>39</sup> Ingram 58.

<sup>40</sup> Ingram 49.

<sup>41</sup> Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, 2005) 94.

<sup>42</sup> Domosh and Seager 7.

<sup>43</sup> Anna T. Sadlier for the *Canadian Messenger*, Sept. 1893, quoted in Atherton 11.

<sup>44</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London; New York: Routledge, 1988) 69.

character and behaviour.<sup>45</sup> The space of the home was thus also seen as a place of constraint where men had to enter the roles of "loving husband and responsible father."<sup>46</sup> In the Institute the sailors had to enact these roles through correspondence with their families, reading quietly in their free time, and abstaining from the corrupting influence of alcohol by attending temperance meetings. The homes that Victorian women created often conflated this moral guidance that they were seen to offer with the actual appearance and physical layout of the home and its contents.<sup>47</sup> It was believed that a proper home and its furnishings would "provide everyday and active reminders of appropriate bourgeois behaviour,"<sup>48</sup> and thus the rooms that these women furnished and decorated were also seen to influence the moral character of the sailors.

These ideals could be seen most clearly in the Victorian parlour, "the most important marker of a family's socioeconomic and moral status."<sup>49</sup> The first Sailors' Institute building featured a captain's parlour that corresponded to the parlour of the Victorian home (Fig. 5). The tasteful and well-arranged parlour suite was meant to express status and character, and it was believed that it had a role in actively shaping that character.<sup>50</sup> As the highest figure in the ship's hierarchy, the captains were like the fathers of the Institute, and in their parlour they could write letters, read books and newspapers, and warm themselves by the fire. The women of the Institute filled it with objects that suggested an upper-middle-class of citizen, including carved oak chairs and desk, a large ornate bookcase and various paintings on the walls and the mantle. Although it

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<sup>45</sup> Domosh and Seager 7.

<sup>46</sup> Pollock 69.

<sup>47</sup> Domosh and Seager 7.

<sup>48</sup> Domosh and Seager 7.

<sup>49</sup> Domosh and Seager 8.

<sup>50</sup> Domosh and Seager 8.

is not apparent here, the piano, or parlour organ, were staples of the Victorian parlour, and from records of furnishings there seems to have been an upright piano used at the Institute. Gathering around the piano to listen to the female members of the family play was an important activity in the Victorian household, and would express gentility, bourgeois good taste and cultural refinement.<sup>51</sup> From photos we can see men and women enacting these gender roles well into the 1950s at the Sailors' Institute Christmas party (Fig. 6). The encouragement to listen and appreciate this music was another way of establishing a familial atmosphere, and brought the sailors' into a class of society that could appreciate a refined activity, far removed from the less noble entertainments in the port.

The spatial division of public and private spheres in society that determined proper gender roles was also mirrored within the home. Beginning in the Georgian era, the house became divided into both public and private areas, where each room was designed to accommodate specific functions of the family or the individual. The bottom floors contained rooms that were considered more public, and were devoted a variety of common activities.<sup>52</sup> The first floor of the Sailors' Institute featured a reading room, library, captain's parlour, game room and concert hall. The second floor contained a chapel, the officers' and engineers' room, the reception room and kitchen, and on the third floor was a large recreation hall.<sup>53</sup> Some common rooms had more private orientations, such as the rooms designated for officers, engineers, and captains, but the private bedrooms were most representative of this private sphere.

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<sup>51</sup> Domosh and Seager 10-11.

<sup>52</sup> Rybczynski 108-109.

<sup>53</sup> "Forty-sixth Annual Report of the Board of Management," in *Montreal Sailors' Institute Thirty-seventh Annual Report, 1898* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1899) 6.

In 1908, the Sailors' Institute was able to purchase the adjoining building at 14 Place Royale and fit the upper two levels with 40 beds (Fig. 7).<sup>54</sup> The creation of this communal bedroom for the sailors was seen as huge achievement since the sailors could then be accommodated for their entire stay in Montreal. Most importantly, it meant that the Institute could control the behaviour and activities of the sailors after the day ended, as they were no longer left to find their own entertainments or lodging in the port. In the Victorian home the notion of surveillance became an important tool to control members of the household, notably the servants, as a way to "thwart challenges to household hierarchies."<sup>55</sup> The design of communal bedroom would have facilitated the surveillance of the entire group of men at night to ensure that proper conduct and behaviour in this heteronormative domestic space continued into the night.

According to design historian Penny Sparke, "the Victorian home set the tone for the contemporary U.S. and British gendered relationships within the home."<sup>56</sup> Stylistically, however, the reaction against Victorian excesses in architecture and decoration led to significant modifications in house designs. New designs that combined the kitchen, dining and family rooms centered largely around efficiency and the surveillance of the family, but Victorian ideals remained embedded in the home to inform proper familial behaviour and heteronormative relationships. Most homes of the modern period favoured this open-design concept, in which the combination of rooms was "in sharp contrast to Victorian interiors, where each social function

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<sup>54</sup> "Sailors' Institute Held Annual Concert Before Close of Navigation," in *Montreal Sailors' Institute Fifty-Ninth Annual Report, Season 1920* (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, Limited, 1921) 10.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2008) 93.

<sup>56</sup> Domosh and Seager 7.



was meant to have its own space in the house."<sup>57</sup> Victorian layouts were not wholly disposed of, and some homes built in the first few decades of the twentieth-century were designed with exteriors that would reflect the changing styles, while "the interior organization of spaces replicated the Victorian homes that had been presented to Americans for almost a century with moral messages about respectability, consumption, and family domesticity."<sup>58</sup>

The new building for the Sailor's Institute used this model for its exterior and interior arrangements. Many of the functions of the house remained contained within their own space following the Victorian tradition, while the exterior of the building was distinctly modern in its design. The new building featured a coffee shop, a main lounge with a television, and off this lounge was a billiard room. On the second floor there was a library and game room, and thirty-eight single rooms and eight double rooms on the third and fourth floors. The captain, officer, and engineering parlours seem to have been condensed into a more contemporary model with the introduction of a "lounge" (Fig. 8). In the *Annual Reports* for the Institute from the years following the new construction in 1954, it is apparent that this lounge was an experimental idea, but the manager was quite pleased when it turned out to be a success, "popular and well patronized" by the sailors. The manager also reported that, regrettably, the lounge and television had perhaps become too popular, and had cut into the citizen following of the feature entertainments such as the concerts held in the new auditorium.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Domosh and Seager 26.

<sup>58</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The MIT Press, 1981) 23.

<sup>59</sup> "The Ninety-Third Annual Meeting," in *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1954* (N.p.: n.p., n.d) 3-7.

In promotions for the new building, special emphasis was placed on the separate bedrooms it provided, as the over-crowding of rooms with sailors and "some classes of citizens" had become a problem for the Sailors' Institute (Fig. 9).<sup>60</sup> The lack of space in the old Institute was offered as the main reason for the creation of this new building, however dividing this space into a number of single bedrooms would not appear to be an efficient use of the new space. Like the exterior's allusions to a hospital setting, the creation of single bedrooms and the separation of the sailors were meant to inspire modern ideals of cleanliness, both physically and morally (Fig. 10). During the meeting of the Furnishings Committee in 1954, it was decided that all bedrooms were to be painted light grey, and furnished with metal dressers, chairs, and night tables,<sup>61</sup> furthering the ties between these spaces for the men and a hospital setting. By separating the sailors within this private sphere of the bedroom, the Institute sought to further control the interaction between the men, preventing more intimate relationships from developing within what was supposedly their own private space. In this space, sexual difference was buried under the homogeneity of both the rooms and prescribed gender roles in order to suppress the human body's desires and needs.<sup>62</sup>

After the constructing the new building and purchasing new furniture, the Sailors' Institute was left with a substantial debt. To save money, it was decided that some items of furniture from the previous building were suitable to be used in the new facility.<sup>63</sup> A list of these

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<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for 1876* (Montreal: John C. Becket, 1877) 4-5.

<sup>61</sup> "Montreal Sailors's Institute: Meeting of Furnishings Committee," in Drawer 10, file: "*Furnishings*" at the Mariner's House archives.

<sup>62</sup> Borden et al. 6.

<sup>63</sup> "The President's Address," in *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1954* (N.p.: n.p., n.d) 3.

items includes many of the more ornate Victorian items of furniture, such as oak bookcases, tables, desks, and chairs, and upholstered armchairs. Also included on the list were a reed organ for the chapel, and upright piano for the lounge, and a grand piano for the concert hall.<sup>64</sup> These pieces of furniture may have seemed out of place in the modern atmosphere of the new building, but provided an important link with the Institute's Victorian past, symbolizing the embedded values of social and moral purity that continued to inform Canadian society and the Sailors' Institute.

The Montreal Sailors' Institute provided many rooms devoted to leisure and relaxing, but was also very active in arranging activities and events for the sailors to keep them off the streets. In his analysis of the social aspects of the Montreal Sailors' Institute at the end of the nineteenth century, historian Darcy Ingram argues that, "The desire to influence sailors' moral identity made for a highly intrusive space in which actions, activities, and events were carefully regulated in order to promote the spiritual and secular values of its organizers."<sup>65</sup> Along with writing letters to their "sweethearts, wives and other friends and relatives"<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 11), the sailors were encouraged to use the games room that offered billiards, table tennis, and participate in team sports such as cricket and football.<sup>67</sup> These were all seen to be important activities to promote heteronormative

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<sup>64</sup> "List of Items of Furniture and other Furnishings," in Drawer 10, file: "*Furnishings*" at the Mariner's House archives.

<sup>65</sup> Ingram 59.

<sup>66</sup> "Report of Annual Meeting, List of Office-Bearers, and the Act of Incorporation," in *Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the Year Ending, 31st January, 1870* (Montreal: J. C. Becket, 1870) 10.

<sup>67</sup> "Montreal Sailors' Institute," Invitation to annual concert, Nov. 1944.

interaction between the men, and by the 1940s dances were hosted by women at the Institute on a weekly basis,<sup>68</sup> which "depended on and encouraged heterosexual familiarity"<sup>69</sup> (Fig. 12).

The weekly concerts held at the concert hall in the Institute became a popular event with both sailors and the Montreal public (Fig. 13). Often attended by many members of Montreal's urban elite, the concerts were "by far the most common means of facilitating contact between sailors and respectable women at the Montreal Sailors' Institute."<sup>70</sup> Although the concerts could be highly formal activities that attracted great crowds, they too were meant to be domestic in character as it was believed that listening to women sing might remind the sailors "of happy childhood days spent in the family home with mothers and sisters, or of the sweeter hours spent with that pure and noble woman who is dearest to him than even mothers or sisters."<sup>71</sup> This experience was another instance of a public space that was meant to function as a private space; in this case, the sailor might be reminded of a private scene with the "noble woman" that was patiently waiting for his return home.

In the beginning, the success of the concerts was attributed to the entertainment provided by artists and choirs from Montreal. By the early twentieth-century, however, the sailors themselves were providing some of their own entertainment with songs, dances, and their performances in troupes such as "fou-fou bands" (Fig. 14). These bands were informal groups of sailors with some musical talent that "had a pantomime and performative style."<sup>72</sup> Some of the

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<sup>68</sup> "President's Address," *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute 1954*, 4-6.

<sup>69</sup> Strange 82.

<sup>70</sup> Ingram 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Montreal Sailors' Institute, Annual Report 1885*, 5: quoted in Ingram 60-61.

<sup>72</sup> Baker and Stanley 120.

men in the fou-fou bands performed in drag, wearing dresses and wigs and enacting "comical parodies of feminine stereotypes" by engaging in activities such as sewing and washing.<sup>73</sup> In a report from Literature and Entertainment Committee in 1915, the sailors' contribution is reported with great enthusiasm, stating:

Years ago it was customary to provide a good supply of city talent to supplement the efforts of the sailors. Now, however, the ships, with their orchestras, music clubs, pierrot troupes, fou-fou bands, impersonators, etc., often provide splendid programmes without any assistance from the landsmen.<sup>74</sup>

It seems that at this point, the implications of the men dressing in women's clothing were not yet realized, and it was embraced as an absurd, comedic act.

While cross-dressing was appreciated as entertainment in the concerts, for the men it was instrumental to questioning the established gender roles promoted by the Institute. By using the body as a site of self-appropriation and adaptation,<sup>75</sup> these men laid claims to identity and representation, rendering non-normative sexuality visible within the Institute.<sup>76</sup> It was in this way that "spaces of representation" were created by the sailors to resist and criticize the dominant social orders on the public stage that was also meant to function as a domestic, private setting, queering both. Even though the Institute tried to control the meaning of gender identity, roles, and sexual relations through controlling sex itself, it was through these acts and clothing that

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<sup>73</sup> Baker and Stanley 121.

<sup>74</sup> "Report of the Literature and Entertainments Committee," *Montreal Sailors' Institute Fifty-fourth Annual Report*, 12-13.

<sup>75</sup> Borden et al. 11.

<sup>76</sup> Tonkiss 101.

non-normative sexuality continued to be explored in a blatantly resistant way that was curiously accepted and applauded by the public.<sup>77</sup>

This space of representation that was "invented and imagined"<sup>78</sup> by the sailors through inverting the social norms that the entire Institute was founded upon, was both powerful and short-lived; after the mention of fou-fou entertainment in the Sailors' Institute's *Annual Report* for 1915, it is hard to come across any further references in any of the Institute's publications or documents. This can perhaps be attributed to the increased popularity of drag acts in both North America and Europe, which, by the middle of the twentieth-century, were considered both a gay activity and a key way that straight people encountered gay men.<sup>79</sup> In Montreal, drag shows were featured at a few drinking establishments that had a majority gay clientele, such as the Tropical Room on Peel Street, and the Miss Montreal contests on the Main.<sup>80</sup> Though it was a brief assertion of identity, the photographs that document this "untold recent past" of homosexual activity at the Sailors' Institute has been entered into its history through this modern media of reproduction.<sup>81</sup>

Changes in the shipping industry and the decreased demand for sailors in turn resulted in less demand for a residence such as the Montreal Sailors' Institute. The Institute sold its building in 1981 to the Maison-des-Peres, a residence for elderly men. It was later sold to the Point-a-Calliere Museum, which now uses the building as an educational centre for school children. The

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<sup>77</sup> Baker and Stanley 37-39.

<sup>78</sup> Borden et al. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Baker and Stanley 31.

<sup>80</sup> Higgins and Chamberland 423.

<sup>81</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003) 1.

Montreal Sailors' Institute changed its name to the "Mariner's House", and moved to a smaller location in the port. The current site offers a chapel, and an area to relax and read, however, their main function is to provide access to telephones, the internet, sending money home to families, and mailing letters. It is open from two o'clock in the afternoon to eleven o'clock in the evening, at which point the Mariner's House van returns sailors to their ships.<sup>82</sup> This current form of the Institute reflects the gradual release of the state's control over lifestyles and non-criminal actions of citizens. The use for a facility that would promote one type of socially acceptable lifestyle became outmoded, and the operation has been reduced to a lounge and facility that does not impose moral views or behaviour, but offers reprieve after work and a way to stay in touch with family and friends.

An encounter with the former Montreal Sailors' Institute, whether entering the building as part of a school group or passing by on the street, would not immediately suggest that such a structure and its operations were instrumental in a project to control the sexuality of a group of men for over a century. Although the current institutional form does not suggest a domestic space, the Institute attempted to create a private sphere on the interior that was structured around a family home, where mother figures provided moral guidance and heteronormative behaviour was encouraged. Sailors were originally brought into an Institute that displayed a distinctly "feminine" atmosphere, but with the rise of the category of the homosexual and its association with "femininity" would necessitate a different approach. The deployment of modern design removed almost all objects associated with "feminine" taste but left the structures and divisions that would suggest a gendered way of interacting with space and people. While the separation of

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<sup>82</sup> Mariner's House of Montreal, "About us," *Mariner's House of Montreal*, 2009, web (accessed 20 Sept. 2009).

bedrooms and removal of decoration were architectural means to influence behaviour, the control over the sailors was most intrusive in the Institute's control over activities and interactions with both men and women. The sailors resisted the Institute's heteronormative prescriptions with the popular drag performances early in the century, in which the men created an imaginary space for themselves where they could assert their identity and transform the meaning of the concert space into one of representation and acceptance, however brief or misinterpreted.





Fig. 1: The original building for the Montreal Sailors' Institute. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Fortieth Annual Report, for the Season 1901*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1902: 1. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 2: The Montreal Sailors' Institute building in 1908 after renovations. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Sixty-third Annual Report, Season 1924*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1925: 2. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 3: The Montreal Sailors' Institute after further renovations. (Photograph of the Montreal Sailor's Institute from a scrapbook in the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 4: The new building for the Montreal Sailors' Institute, completed in 1954. (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1954*: cover photo. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 5: The captain's parlour in the first building of the Montreal Sailors' Institute. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Forty-second Annual Report, Season 1903*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1904: 18b. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 6: Sailors gathered around the piano at the Sailors' Institute's Christmas party, 1958. (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1958*: 6. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 7: The communal bedroom in the additional building of the Montreal Sailors' Institute, c.1908. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Forty-sixth Annual Report, Season 1907*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1908: 28. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 8: The new lounge in the Montreal Sailors' Institute. (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1954*: 8. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 9: A crowded bedroom at the old building for the Montreal Sailors' Institute. (Newspaper clipping found in scrapbook in the Mariner's House archives. No source information included.)



Fig. 10: The new, separate bedrooms created for the men. (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1954*: 6. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 11: Sailors writing letters and reading in their Victorian reading room. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Forty-seventh Annual Report, Season 1908*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1909: 11. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 12: One of the weekly dances held at the Montreal Sailors' Institute, 1946. (From the *Annual Report of the Montreal Sailors' Institute for the year 1946*: 6. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 13: A concert performance by a sailor at the Montreal Sailor's Institute. (Photograph from a scrapbook held at the Mariner's House archives.)



Fig. 14: A Fou-fou band on a ship. Note the three men in the centre of the photograph dressed as women. (From the *Montreal Sailors' Institute Forty-seventh Annual Report, Season 1908*. Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1909: 11. Held at the Mariner's House archives.)

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