Pointe-au-Père, Québec
Fog Alarm Building

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Fog Alarm Building at Pointe-au-Père, was built in 1903 to designs prepared by the engineering branch of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. It was transferred by Transport Canada to Parks Canada in 1976. Under an agreement with the latter, the site on which the fog alarm sits is operated by the Corporation du Musée de la Mer, a local historical society. See FHBRO Building Report 90-11.

Reasons for Designation

The fog alarm building was designated Recognized for its historic associations, its architectural importance and its environmental value.

The construction of the fog alarm building in 1903, was a first step on this site in a modernization program begun in the same year to improve 14 light stations along the St. Lawrence River, from the Strait of Belle Isle to Pointe-au-Père. This program represented an effort to improve navigation along the St. Lawrence River in the early 20th century to improve trade. The site had also gained significance through the 19th century as a home for river pilots, its prominent position providing an excellent staging in point for the required exchange of personnel. This activity encouraged additional improvements to navigational aids during the same period, including a new quay in 1902 and a Marconi Station in 1909. The modernization program culminated on this site with the 1909 construction of the reinforced concrete lighthouse.

The original one-and-a-half storey building was of wood frame construction, clad in cedar siding and roofed with cedar shingles. The building has been much altered over time, to suit ongoing technological developments. Elements lost include the original annex, the adjacent fog horn base and circular rail, the house's single-leaf window shutters, its cedar shingle roof and both of the original roof ventilators. A large dormer added after 1953 to the northern roof slope served as a later support for the fog horn.

More importantly, the building was used to test a number of sound-generating mechanisms prior to their use elsewhere in Canada. While the annex held an experimental Scottish siren, a diaphone was housed in the main house. Both used the same horn as a resonator; frequent changes to the orientation and elevation of the horn were made to increase its effectiveness, including stations on the building's roof, one such on a dormer constructed for the purpose.

In 1972, the Department of Transport replaced the diaphone with an electronic signal; however the original machinery remains within, on its concrete base.

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Though most of the buildings present on the site when the fog alarm building was built have disappeared and been replaced by later structures, the site has preserved its

essential identity as a light station. The fog alarm building plays an important role in reinforcing the present character of the site, long established by the concrete lighthouse of 1909.

Character-defining Elements

Much of the architectural character of the fog alarm building survives in its original wooden materials, simple forms and fenestration patterns. The possibility of restoration should not detract attention from the need to protect the intact original interior equipment and layout. Further, any attempt to restore missing elements should not return the building to an appearance out of context with the buildings that now surround it. Restoration decisions should emerge from a site-wide conservation plan which aims at coherence of presentation among all site elements in support of the site's strongest heritage values, which include its portrayal of light station evolution over time.

Repair decisions, particularly to address deteriorated original concrete should maintain the forms of original elements, and not prejudice future restoration possibilities.

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