

Cove Island, Ontario
Cove Island Lightstation: Tower
Lake Huron

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Cove Island Lightstation Tower was built from 1855 to 1859 under the authority of the Board of Works, Canada West, by the contractor John Brown. It continues to serve its original purpose. Transport Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 90-216.

Reasons for Designation

The Cove Island Lightstation Tower was designated Classified because of its thematic association with the opening of navigation on Lake Huron and points west. The designation also recognizes its aesthetic and functional design, which is of the highest quality, and its picturesque setting and landmark status.

One of the so-called "Imperial Towers", this tower is associated with the installation of lighthouses on the Great Lakes beginning in 1804. The opening of the Bruce Peninsula for settlement in the mid 1850s, a free-trade agreement with the United States in 1854, and the Sault Ste. Marie Canal in 1855 prompted the need for navigational aids and the establishment of these towers. One of the most attractive lighthouses in Canada, this tower counts among the few constructed of stone (wood, iron and concrete being more typical). Of excellent functional design, the tower is as strong and stable as it is aesthetically pleasing. It employs materials and craftsmanship of the highest standard, typical of the work of the contractor, John Brown.

A tall handsome structure on a picturesque site, the tower adds greatly to the interest of boating within the area.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Cove Island Lighthouse resides in its elegant proportions and its simple rusticated stone construction. Architectural features of this structure which are of note, and which should be preserved, include its masonry detailing; its whitewash finish (dating to 1871); its tall, round, slightly tapered form corbelled at the top to form a gallery and base for the lantern; its round-headed doorway and small, narrow windows with plain stone sills staggered around the tower; and its magnificent twelve-sided polygonal lantern manufactured by the Louis Saulter Company of Paris. The lantern provides an important component of the appearance of the structure, and includes three rows of rectangular glass panes; a segmentally ridged domed roof

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topped by a ventilator in the shape of a ball pinnacle; and twelve bronze lions' heads at

each angle of the eaves line. Continued conservation of this feature is encouraged.

The tower's structural system employs heavy timber to provide lateral stability, with inner and outer wythes of cut masonry with rubble infill providing compressive strength. Regular examination and timely conservation work should be undertaken to ensure the continued integrity of the wood members, especially where they are set into the masonry walls. Repair work should respect the integrity of the structural system.

Interior components which merit preservation include the first storey wooden stairwell, curved cast-iron-and-wood stairs to the second and upper levels, straight, steep wooden stairs to intermediate levels, zinc fuel stands, metal flooring, floor brackets, the optic pedestal, and ventilation devices. Modifications related to the ongoing use of the building should be designed with minimal impact on historic fabric.

Associated outbuildings contribute to the character of the site and should be maintained if possible. Development of adjacent land would reduce this historic appearance and should be discouraged.

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