

Battle of the Windmill National Historic Site

**Windmill Tower**

Prescott, Ontario

**HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

Windmill Tower was built in approximately 1832, as a wind-powered grist mill. During the Rebellion of 1837-38, it was the site of the Battle of the Windmill, and milling operations permanently ceased at this time. In 1872, it was converted to a lighthouse. Since 1978, it has been interpreted as a battle site. Environment Canada Canadian Parks Service is the custodial department. See FHBRO Building Report 88-76.

**Reasons for Designation**

The Windmill Tower was designated Classified because of its important historical associations, its functional design and its environment.

The current physical form of the Tower is a result of its evolving historical function: gristmill, Rebellion battlesite and defence location, and lighthouse. It was initially built as a grist mill, one of a very few wind-powered mills in English Canada. During the Rebellion of 1837-38, it was the scene of an important battle when Americans who supported the Rebellion attempted a landing at Prescott in 1838 which led to a battle at the Windmill. To defend against further invasions, the tower was occupied for the subsequent year by British troops. In 1872, the tower was converted to a lighthouse to facilitate use of the St. Lawrence as a transportation route. Finally, as a result of its role in the Rebellion, it was designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in 1923, and it is currently interpreted by the Canadian Parks Service as a battle site.

Windmill Tower is a rare surviving example of an English-built wind-powered mill in Upper Canada. Its simple functional design and stately profile are a result of its British origins. The building is unique in its later adaptation as a lighthouse. The prominent site on the open space of Windmill Point is relatively unchanged, and the Tower is both a physical and symbolic landmark for the region.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the building resides in its highly functional design, those features which illustrate its successful adaptation to changing uses, and the nature of its environment.

As a result of its simple, functional design, Windmill Tower has served successfully both as a grist-mill and a lighthouse, and exhibits features of both. The basic design of the tower derives from its mill origin. The round, slightly tapering tower is constructed of coursed rubble-stone, with walls about three feet thick at the base.

.../2

Battle of the Windmill National Historic Site  
**Windmill Tower** (Continued)

The inner wall steps back at each floor, forming a ledge which originally supported the wooden floors of the mill. The unusual grouping of the louvered windows into pairs arranged in vertical bands was designed to light the milling machinery. The size of the segmentally-arched doorway is an indicator of the building's mill origin. The octagonal cast-iron lantern was added in 1872 when the structure was adapted to its new function as a lighthouse. The current interior wooden stairway, built at the same time, provides access to the lantern.

As the significance of the structure lies in its various historical functions, the form, character and materials should be carefully conserved as they have evolved over time. A regular program of inspection and maintenance should be established, if not already in place. Repairs to the masonry and repointing of the mortar should occur under the supervision of a masonry conservation expert.

The tower is sited on a high point of land above the St. Lawrence River. The open pastoral character of the setting has existed since the group of houses surrounding the mill were burnt during the Battle of the Windmill. The exposed location gives visual prominence to the tower from both the river and the highway. The openness of the site should be preserved.

1992.10.01