HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Caribou Island Lighttower
Caribou Island, Ontario

The Caribou Island Lighthouse, a landmark in the evolution of light tower design, was built in 1911 by the Department of Marine, to designs produced by its engineering department, under the direction of Chief Engineer William P. Anderson. It occupies a small island on Lake Superior near the American border. The destaffed station is now completely automated. The custodial department is Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard. See FHBRO Building Report 88-142.

Reasons for Designation

The Caribou Island Lighthouse was designated Classified because of its historical and architectural significance and because of its importance to the character of its setting.

The construction of the Caribou Island tower marked an increase in shipping activity on the Great Lakes and availability of increased funds for lighthouse design and construction.

Built during a transitional phase in the development of reinforced concrete lighthouse construction in Canada, the six buttresses of Caribou Island illustrate a short-lived but uniquely Canadian experiment in tower design and construction. Higher and more tapered than examples built before it, the Caribou Island Lighttower is an assured expression of reinforced concrete technology at an early stage of its development in Canada. It is among the most impressive lights on the Great Lakes.

The scale of the tower and the constricted character of the island on which it is built, make it the clearly dominant element in the landscape.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this tower is defined by its architectural and engineering design, the materials of its construction, and its relationship to its setting.

In appearance, its precision, scale and streamlined form are characteristic of the last three flying buttress lighthouses built by the Department of Marine. In terms of structural design, the flying buttresses were designed to provide stability and resistance to lateral thrust and vibration with a minimum of material. Reinforced concrete floors on the interior added to the lateral bracing. The Department experimented with both mesh and solid bar reinforcing steel in their light tower designs, and took particular care with the placement of the steel.

The lighthouse, although now fully automated, retains its basic form and integrity.

Ongoing maintenance and periodic repair, most notably in 1948 with the application of a new surface coating, have kept both the visual appearance and structural integrity intact. The suggestion of filling in the spaces between the buttresses and the walls was rejected in 1948. It is recommended that a similar policy of maintenance and periodic repair be pursued in the future.

Particular attention should be given to retaining the historic appearance. Any substantial repair should take advantage of current research on methods for the conservation of historic reinforced concrete.

The continuing use of the tower as a functioning navigational aid is the best assurance of its ongoing survival, and the dominance of this element within its natural setting.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice.*

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