

90-64

Estevan Point, British Columbia
Lighttower
Vancouver Island

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Estevan Point Lighttower was built in 1909 to designs by Col. William Anderson, Chief Engineer of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, in an expansion of the navigation system along the British Columbia coast. The original light has been replaced. The manned Lighttower continues to serve its original function. The Canadian Coast Guard is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 90-64.

Reasons for Designation

The Estevan Point Lighttower was designated Classified as a result of its experimental design and use of materials; for its landmark status; and for its association with the provision of coastal navigational aid. The tower may also be associated with the passage of the Mobilization Act, which instituted conscription during the Second World War.

The Estevan Point Lighttower is among the early reinforced-concrete buildings in Canada, and is considered by many to be the supreme example of Colonel Anderson's experimental lighttower design employing flying buttresses. This pioneering application of reinforced concrete construction to tall structures gained Anderson international attention. The Estevan Point Lighttower, combining experimental engineering with pleasing aesthetic expression, is of national importance.

The lighttower is located on an isolated site high above the Pacific Ocean at the end of Hesquiatic Peninsula. It is only accessible by helicopter or overland since the treacherous shore makes landing by boat too dangerous. Dominating its cliffside site, the lighttower is a west coast landmark.

One of a series of towers built along the treacherous western coastline of Vancouver Island, the Estevan Point tower was designed to function as a landfall light on this region of the Pacific coast. It continues to serve deep sea and coastal traffic today. During the Second World War, the lighttower reputedly was shelled by a Japanese submarine while a crucial debate on conscription was occurring in Parliament. The attack led to the acceptance of Prime Minister Mackenzie King's Mobilization Act.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Estevan Point Lighttower resides in its pioneering design, elegant profile and early use of reinforced concrete, and by its physical significance

within its setting.

Estevan Point, British Columbia
Lighttower (Continued)
Vancouver Island

The one-hundred-foot-high octagonal tower, comprised of a central column surrounded by flying buttresses, represents an experimental approach to lighthouse design based on Anderson's assessment of stresses and wind loading.

The buttresses are designed to stiffen the tower and thus to stabilize the light during high winds, and are open rather than solid to reduce costs. The physical expression of the structural design is essential to the heritage character of this structure and should be maintained and protected.

While the desire to achieve international navigation standards motivated the designer, the elegantly tapered profile, the strong vertical emphasis created by the buttresses, and the interplay of light and shadow produced by the curving buttress attachments reflect his highly-developed aesthetic sensibility. No decorative elaboration detracts from the clarity of the silhouette. The tall narrow window openings, placed in accordance with the interior spiral staircase, emphasize the verticality of the tower. The modern instrument-support projecting from the lantern platform, while vertically oriented, tends to detract from the purity of the profile. An alternate location should be found if possible. Alterations which are required to accommodate the tower's continuing use should be designed with minimal disruption or loss of historic fabric and minimal disruption of the tower's profile.

The Estevan Point lighttower is a very early example of the use of reinforced concrete in the construction of tall structures. A program of regular inspection and maintenance should be followed, and should be based on the advice of conservation specialists with knowledge of historic concrete. The lantern, the spiral steel staircase, and other original fittings should be preserved.

The lighttower is set among secondary structures associated with the operation of the light station, although the original buildings have been replaced over time. The isolated nature of this self-contained enclave in its rugged setting should be protected.

1994.12.13

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