

90-214

Christian Island, Ontario  
**Christian Island Lightstation Tower**  
Lake Huron

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The Christian 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 as a lighthouse. The Canadian Coast Guard is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 90-214.

### **Reasons for Designation**

The Christian Island Lightstation Tower was designated Recognized because of its thematic association with the opening of navigation on Lake Huron and points west; because of its functional design and high quality craftsmanship and materials; and because of its designers (the pre-confederation Canadian Board of Works and John Brown, the contractor) who created here one of the best examples of the work of the Canadian Board of Works. It was also designated because of its picturesque setting and landmark status.

Constructed as 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-1850's, 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 subsequent establishment of these towers.

Among the most attractive lighthouses in Canada, these towers count among the few constructed of stone (wood, iron and concrete being more typical). Of an excellent functional design that achieves both stability and beauty, the Christian Island Lightstation Tower employs materials of the highest standard, and the craftsmanship is of a high order, typical of the work of the contractor, John Brown.

A tall structure on a picturesque site, the tower adds to the interest of boating within its scenic immediate area. As a landmark, it continues to serve recreational and commercial navigational traffic on Georgian Bay.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the Christian Island Lightstation Tower resides in its elegant proportions and masonry construction. Features of note which should be preserved

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include its rusticated stone construction; its whitewash finish (probably dating to c. 1871); its tall, round, slightly tapered form corbelled at the top to form a gallery and base for the lantern (now missing); and its round-headed doorway and small, narrow windows with plain stone sills staggered around the tower.

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 original structural system.

The use of a granite ring to which the lantern was formerly bolted was unusual (being more typically made of iron). The lantern originally provided an important visual component of the appearance of the structure, but is now removed.

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

Although the adjacent keeper's dwelling is in a deteriorated condition, these two structures together present an image of the site which is close to its original appearance. Stabilization of the dwelling is encouraged to ensure the continuing preservation of this structure. Its loss, or the development of adjacent lands, would reduce the character of the site and should be discouraged.

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