

Channel-Port aux Basques, Newfoundland
Channel Head Lighthouse

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Channel Head Lightstation, one of a few surviving examples of nineteenth-century cast-iron technology for lighthouse design, was built in 1874-75. It has survived over a century of severe weather conditions without any major repairs or alterations. A double house was added to the site in the 1880's and there is now a small complex of facilities on the island. The custodial agency is the Canadian Coast Guard. See FHBRO Building Report 88-37.

Reason for Designation

The Channel Head Lightstation was designated Recognized because of its historical associations, its functional design and its importance within its present environment.

Its construction, on the extreme southwestern tip of Newfoundland, relates to the historical importance of the fishery and maritime trade to the colony. The new lighthouse was part of a larger effort to ensure safe transatlantic travel through the Straits of Belle Isle, as well as a marker for local traffic using the harbor at Port aux Basques. In terms of local development, it marked the beginning of the evolution of the local communities from small isolated outposts to their eventual status as an integrated settlement serving as a rail and ferry terminus as well as a fishing port. It remains a major light on this coast.

The design of the lighthouse is important as a modest but intact example of cast-iron construction technology. The fact that the material was cheap and durable, and could be prefabricated and then assembled by relatively unskilled labour, made it particularly attractive for navigational aids on the rugged Newfoundland coast.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of this lighthouse is defined by the structure itself and its setting.

The structure is a circular tower, about eight meters in height, with a small wood frame lean-to at its base. The weather vane, lantern and lantern platform, occupy the top third of the tower. A small window is located in the lower portion. The utilitarian character of the tower is reinforced by its smooth tubular construction and plainness of its parts.

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Channel Head Lighthouse (Continued)

The tower itself is composed of several cylindrical segments bolted together on the interior to form a smooth external surface. It appears that it was fabricated in Britain and shipped over to Newfoundland for assembly. The durability of the tower suggests that the quality of the original casting and the execution of the structural design were very good.

The survival of the lighthouse has also been due, presumably, to a good program of regular maintenance. Such a program should continue. If defects in the cast-iron do appear, qualified metal conservators should be consulted.

The setting, a small island occupying a strategic location in relation to the harbor and the adjacent shipping lanes, is an integral part of the lighthouse design. The buildings of the Channel Head lightstation are the only structures on the island and fit its maritime character. The buildings and associated features, such as the landing pad and tramway, have evolved naturally as part of the function of the site and can be considered compatible with the heritage character of the tower. Any changes to the site should be in keeping with this functional nature and not disturb the landmark status of the original lighthouse itself.