



Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act: Statement of Significance

Fisgard Lighthouse, Colwood, British Columbia

1859-1860 (*year of construction*)

(Ref. 2013-LR-168, "Fisgard Lighthouse")

1 - Description of Historic Place

Fisgard Lighthouse, a tapering 56-foot (17 m) cylindrical tower surmounted by a multi-faceted lantern, is built into a rectangular two-storey dwelling with a gable roof. Constructed in 1859-1860 to mark the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour, it was commissioned on November 16, 1860 and automated in 1928. The lighthouse was in continuous operation until 1957, when a fire temporarily halted its use as an aid to navigation. It is located on Fisgard Island, a small island south of Vancouver Island, on the west side of the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour, just north of Juan de Fuca Strait, in British Columbia.

There are two related buildings on the site that contribute to the heritage character of the lighthouse: (1) a replica boathouse built in 1978; and (2) a replica storehouse built in the 1960s.

2 - Heritage Value

The Fisgard Lighthouse is a heritage lighthouse because of its historical, architectural, and community values.

a - Historical values

Built 11 years prior to British Columbia's entry into Confederation, the Fisgard Lighthouse is the first and oldest lighthouse on Canada's west coast. It illustrates the theme of expansion of the system of marine aids to navigation in Canada, and more specifically the establishment of a permanent coastal navigational aid system in British Columbia. The lighthouse made navigation safer in Juan de Fuca Strait during the early period of development of Vancouver Island and British Columbia as a whole. Constructed to mark the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour, it served as an important symbol of sovereignty—British, then colonial and finally Canadian.

Fisgard Lighthouse influenced the development of the towns of Esquimalt and Victoria following the Fraser River gold rush in 1858, which led to a considerable increase in vessel traffic. Construction of the lighthouse enabled ships to navigate safely in this narrow zone of rocky outcrops, thus promoting trade and settlement. Since Fisgard Lighthouse helped to guide British Royal Navy ships into Esquimalt Harbour and later Royal Canadian Navy vessels, it played a central role in the life of seamen at the Esquimalt naval base.

b - Architectural values

The Fisgard Lighthouse is characterized by a tapered silhouette, elegant lines, its round tapered profile, its projecting platform, and its subtle proportions. The attached dwelling complements the tower and creates a well-scaled design. Gothic Revival influences can be seen in the pointed-arch windows and the brick corbelling below the lantern platform.

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The quality of the building materials, workmanship and finishing details are excellent. The tower and integrated dwelling are characterized by their simply detailed brick construction. Whereas the dwelling is painted, the lighthouse was originally painted and then later covered with stucco to reduce maintenance. The lighthouse base and the platform supporting the lantern are made of granite. The use of brick and granite attest to the initial desire to ensure durability and fire safety. Inside the tower, there is a beautiful cast iron stairway which is of aesthetic note, partly due to its open geometric pattern.

c - Community values

The Fisgard Lighthouse's visual prominence stems from its location on the rocky outcrop at the entrance to the Esquimalt Harbour. With its tall, white, tapered profile, set against the red colour of the dwelling, it dominates the surrounding maritime landscape. The lighthouse and its attached dwelling establish the site's present character.

The Fisgard Lighthouse is a well-known symbol and the site receives many visitors and is highly prized by people living in the Victoria area as well as by tourists. It is also the most visible navigation landmark for boats sailing from Juan de Fuca Strait to Esquimalt Harbour, and is well known to foreign vessels.

d - Related buildings

Two related buildings, as listed in section 1, contribute to the heritage character of the lighthouse.

*The character-defining elements
related to this designation are listed
at the end of this document.*

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3 - Character-Defining Elements

a - The following character-defining elements of the Fisgard Lighthouse should be respected:

- its location on Fisgard Island, an outcropping of rock at the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour;
- its intact, as-built structural form, height, profile and balanced proportions characterized by its cylindrical tower attached to a rectangular dwelling;
- its tapered cylindrical tower of stucco-covered brick;
- its projecting platform;
- the brick corbelling below the platform;
- the multi-faceted glass and metal lantern, surmounted by a metal arrow-shaped weathervane;
- its Gothic Revival style pointed-arch windows;
- the interior layout of the tower and its physical and functional links with the keeper's dwelling ;
- the cast iron staircase with its open geometric pattern;
- the Gothic Revival style interior ornamentation, including the open geometric layout of the staircase;
- the integrated rectangular two-storey dwelling, which is constructed of brick and has a gable roof;
- the dwelling's chimney with its rounded cap;
- the Gothic Revival style ground floor windows with weatherproofed shutters;
- the traditional red and white exterior colour scheme, with the white tower and the dwelling door and windows, accented by the dwelling's red cladding and the red cast iron lantern;
- its visual prominence in relation to the water and landscape.

b - The following character-defining elements of the related building should be respected:

- their respective built forms, profiles and proportions;
- their contextual relationships to the lighthouse within an historic light station setting.

For guidance on interventions, please refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*.

Date: April 2013