

Race Rocks, British Columbia
Race Rocks Lighttower
Vancouver Island

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Race Rocks Lighttower was built in 1860 by the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island, with the assistance of the British Colonial Office. Its light was replaced in 1988. The manned station continues to serve its original function. The Canadian Coast Guard is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 90-85.

Reasons for Designation

The Race Rocks Lighttower was designated Recognized as a result of its environmental significance, its early association with the provision of navigational aids on the Pacific Coast, and its functional design and use of materials.

The Race Rocks Lighttower dominates its site, a small barren island located about twelve miles from Victoria in an area of strong tides and reefs. Given its important function in these treacherous waters, the Lighttower is a regional landmark among mariners.

The Lighttower, one of the first built on the west coast, was constructed in response to the increased maritime traffic arising from the Fraser River gold rush. By locating the light on an island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, local authorities aided merchant and passenger ships headed to Victoria and naval vessels destined for the base at Esquimalt. The influx of settlers hoping to benefit from the gold strike quickly changed Victoria from a fur-trading fort to an incorporated city, and ensured the continued need for a lighttower.

The Race Rocks Lighttower is one of a very few Canadian examples of its type. The design is derived from one commonly employed by the British for "Imperial" lighthouses associated with colonial trade routes. Built of local stone and by local craftsmen, the lantern and original light were supplied by the British.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Race Rocks Lighttower is defined by its profile, functional design and materials, and by its importance in its environment.

The tall tapered profile of the Race Rocks Lighttower is typical of the "Imperial" design, with limited decorative detailing and stately proportions. The character of the Race

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Rocks Lighttower is found in its robust stonework: large, rusticated blocks of granite composing the base and lantern, and similarly finished sandstone in the body of the tower. The raised door and lower-level windows are set in arched openings in the thick masonry wall, while the upper window-openings form small squares.

In 1962 the original lightkeeper's residence, which was physically connected to the lighttower, was demolished. This required the provision of an exterior staircase to the second-floor tower entrance and some patching of the tower stonework. Care should be taken to avoid further changes to the tower's profile.

Given the highly exposed site, remedial masonry work has been required on several occasions and will continue to be required periodically. Since the stonework determines to a large extent the character of this structure, inspection and maintenance by qualified masonry conservation professionals should be undertaken regularly. The black and white identifying colour scheme is original, and should be retained. The interior stone stairway should be preserved, as should all original interior fittings.

The light station is the sole occupant of the eight-acre Race Rocks in the Juan de Fuca Strait. Secondary structures associated with its operation surround the lighttower, and merit preservation. The surging tides make the island relatively inaccessible except by helicopter; the rugged isolated character of the site should be preserved.

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