

FHBRO Number 96-96

Colwood, British Columbia

Searchlight System - Defence Electric Light No. 1

603 Fort Rodd Hill Road

The Defence Electric Light No. 1, part of the Searchlight System, was constructed in 1903. Part of the coastal defence system to protect the Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, it was a modification of War Office Design No. 58643 designed by the British Royal Engineers. The steel shutters were War Office Type Design No. 37001. The structure housed a 90 inch Canadian General Electric Type B searchlight, which was superceded in 1940 by the more powerful Searchlight No. 6. The original light of Defence Electric Light No. 1 was removed in the mid-1950s. The rear doors have been removed (nd). Site changes include a chain link fence near the cliff edge of the emplacement and concrete steps at the rear (nd). The structure is interpreted as part of Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 96-96.

Reasons For Designation

The Defence Electric Light No. 1 has been designated Recognized because of its architectural importance and its historical associations as well as its environmental significance.

The structure's irregular shape and single room layout were specifically devised for the accommodation of a searchlight. The simple functionality in the design and craftsmanship is expressed in the exposed concrete construction with sliding steel shutter doors.

One of two original defence lights and an integral part of the Searchlight system, the structure is also associated with the upgrading of the night-time capabilities of the Esquimalt-Victoria coastal defence capability.

The site has witnessed minor changes, but the untamed rocky landscape survives. The modest relationship of the structure to the Juan de Fuca Strait and the landscape to the north has been maintained.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Defence Electric Light No. 1 resides in the overall massing, profile, construction materials, interiors and site relationships.

The single-storey, flat-roofed searchlight structure has an irregular massing. The roof profile includes a small chimney stack and the slight projection of a coping to keep

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water off the walls. The footprint is squarish with a small rear projection and the side walls angled to a narrow width to the front. The side swinging shutters determine the width at the front, reflecting the pragmatic approach to the design of this simple structure. The massing, profile and footprint should be respected.

The minimal detailing of the concrete reflects the functional purpose of the structure. The exterior materials, including the original steel plate shutters, merit a regular maintenance program.

The structure has maintained its original one-room layout and single functional use. When it is operationally appropriate, the rear doors should be reinstated in accordance with historic precedents for design and materials.

The immediate site with its rocky terrain is characteristic of the strait's shoreline and should be maintained. The coastal setting and the careful attempt to maintain a subdued presence on the site, while having more prominence from the water, reflect its military function. Alternatives to the chain-link fence should be considered.

1998.02.19

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