

Shoal Martello Tower

Kingston Harbor

Kingston Martello Tower, Ontario

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Shoal Martello Tower is one of a group built in Kingston in response to the Oregon Crisis during 1846-47. It is located 91 m. from the shore of the downtown area on a small shoal, the only example in Canada surrounded by water. In total sixteen martello towers were constructed by the British in defence of North America, ten of which survive. Environment Canada is the custodian of the tower. See FHBRO Report 88-77.

Reason for Designation

The Shoal Martello Tower was designated Recognized because of its functional design, particularly the excellent quality of masonry construction, its siting in the water, which has remained unchanged, and to a lesser extent its association with British defence fortifications in Canada.

The architectural design of Shoal Tower represents the last phase and culmination of martello tower design in British territories. Its design is most closely linked with the English South Coast tower. The most significant design aspects are the level of economy and efficiency attained in terms of function, materials, durability and low maintenance; the particularly Canadian adaptation of a conical snow roof added a few years after construction; and its siting in the water.

Character Defining Elements

This designation applies to the entire building and its setting.

The heritage character of the Shoal Martello Tower is defined by its functional elements (military engineering), aesthetic qualities, siting in the water, proximity to the downtown area, and its broader context of British military fortifications in Kingston.

Of greatest significance are the military engineering features (functional elements) which represent the culmination of the final phase of British martello tower design, post 1805. The aesthetic quality is derived mainly from the adept synthesis of the functional criteria. No future use proposals have been identified but it is recommended that this building be conserved as a military engineering artifact.

The form of the tower is cylindrical with the exterior walls tapering in slightly at the top and a shallow conical roof over the gun platform, the roof being discarded during battle by means of a central peg and cable system. Inside are two stories. The lower level

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Shoal Martello Tower

Kingston Harbor (Continued)

contains what was once a state-of-the-art powder magazine designed without metal to

prevent sparks and with ventilation and a brick lining to prevent dampness. The ceiling of the second floor barracks, also the gun platform above, was intended to be bomb-proof by making use of a three-foot thick circular barrel vault, the wedge shaped stones of the arch preventing collapse under attack.

The plan is intricate and intact and should be maintained. The exterior perimeter of the wall is slightly elliptical but inside it is circular, resulting in a thicker wall towards attack from the water but thinner towards the protected land side. As was typical of martello engineering, each stone was dimensioned prior to construction using mathematical calculations to insure an exact and tight fit. On the second floor barracks level, facing the protected land side, are three small windows and the characteristic martello tower door, designed to the height of one man standing on another's shoulders. The massive double wall construction contains stairs and vents. The exterior face is limestone ashlar, quite smooth and unornamented to prevent the enemy from gaining a foothold. It is recommended that the masonry be regularly inspected and maintained because of its marine location.

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