

# Point Atkinson Light Station

Statement of Significance  
25 January 2010



Lighthouse c. 1925, BCAR c-06171



Top: Concrete steps and railing  
Centre: Stone retaining wal  
Bottom: Wooden barracks

**Point Atkinson Light Station**  
**West Vancouver, B.C.**  
**1912**

**Description of Historic Place**

The Point Atkinson Light Station site is comprised of a complex including the iconic red and white lighthouse tower; six ancillary buildings and structures related to the lighthouse, and significant environmental and cultural landscape elements located on a 2.5 acre granite outcrop on Burrard Inlet, adjacent to the forested Lighthouse Park in West Vancouver. North of the lighthouse complex, but not within the Light Station precinct, is a grouping of structures associated with military activity during the Second World War.

**Value**

The Point Atkinson Light Station as a whole has value for the collection of lighthouse and ancillary buildings that together comprise a full Light Station complex, and for the roles the site has played in the maritime trade, maritime life safety, and military defense. The Light Station site has served as a familiar landmark and life safety station for marine traffic since the first wood-framed lighthouse was erected here in 1874. The present reinforced concrete lighthouse replaced the original wooden structure in 1912 and was re-constructed in 1925. The site represents the first non-aboriginal settlement on the North Shore and pre-dates the settlement of West Vancouver at a time when the prevention of shipping accidents was a primary concern in the interests of the young port of Vancouver. The site is well-known for being integral to the growth of Vancouver Harbour and for its long-time role in navigation and lifesaving for BC's maritime trade.

The Point Atkinson Light Station is located at the southern tip of Lighthouse Park, which is one of the few remaining examples of a remnant old growth coastal forest in the Lower Mainland. The park is a biologically rich and unique resource, considered by many to be the jewel of West Vancouver's park system. Natural landscape features, including geological formations, marine shoreline habitat and a diversity of native flora and fauna are a reminder of the richness of the site's ecology, as is its location within the Pacific Flyway, the major north-south route for migratory bird populations on the west coast.

Point Atkinson has a number of important cultural landscape features that reflect its use over time. Building on the site has been a response to the site's natural geology, topography and climate. Such features include bridge structures, walkways and stairways, stone and concrete walls, and other infrastructure that supports the site's variety of uses through adaptation to the landscape.

Point Atkinson is a landscape modified by cultural uses. Its geography is the sole reason for the location of the lighthouse and the resulting development of the cultural landscape. The landscape is important as a record of both the needs of government for safety and defense and the layers of human habitation of the site, a reflection of the kind of lifestyle lived by the lighthouse keepers and their families. Features such as the lawns, the layout of past and current garden beds and traces of cultivated plant material are evidence of the ongoing use of the gardens by residents of the site and are evidence of the evolution of the domestic gardens over time. This pocket of technical and domestic landscape is separated from the rest of West Vancouver by the forested wilderness of Lighthouse Park.

Circulation patterns on the site reflect the local topography and the site's history of use as a functioning Light Station. Curving walkways connect the lighthouse to the gardens and residences and the wharf, as well as to the World War II era bunkhouses, adjacent but located in Lighthouse Park outside the Light Station precinct. The simple stairs and pipe rails reflect the utilitarian character of the site. Stunning views of Vancouver and Burrard Inlet are a key component of the cultural landscape.

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for the construction of the lighthouse; the forest provided accessible firewood for use in the lighthouse steam plant. The federal government's uniformity in building construction is reflected in the standardized plan of the lighthouse and the two associated residences, and in the recognizable red and white colours used for the lighthouse, the ancillary buildings and exterior site features such as the railings.

The lighthouse expresses engineering history and qualities through a connection to William Anderson, chief engineer at the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries, and its inclusion in the Engineering Institute of Canada's working paper entitled *Engineering Designations of National Historical Significance* (<http://www.eic-ici.ca/>).

The design of the lighthouse combines the structural and technical requirements of a Light Station with clean modern design. Its hexagonal tapered tower with six flared buttresses, designed by William Anderson, reflects early experiments with cast-in-place, buttress based steel reinforced concrete structures. The lighthouse itself is a modern expression of the use of reinforced concrete, a meeting of form and function which allows the new material to speak for itself. The overall utilitarian character of the site is suited to its function and provides a particular sense of place.

The story of the wartime use of the site is an important heritage value. A coast defense installation from 1939-1945, Point Atkinson was an integral part of the defense scheme for the Port of Vancouver during World War II. Remaining features on the site itself include a searchlight emplacement, concrete pounder gun pad with bolts, concrete pedestal for the depression range finder, the block house, and the searchlight engine room. The remaining buildings of the military camp, including the officer's mess, ablution hut, kitchen and sleeping barracks are not on the site, but located nearby, just north of the gates. These buildings are critical to its significance as contiguous features that add to the World War II grouping of features.

The arrangement of the buildings on the site reflect its use over time. The lighthouse and a former duplex residence were sited to relate to each other based on the use of the site as a lighthouse with a residential component. Some time after 1944 the duplex was torn down and replaced with the two current detached dwellings. Most of the buildings dating from the Second World War form a separate cluster. The block house, built in 1942, is related to the Light Station by use rather than by era. The two residential dwellings, built in 1962, reflect the importance of having a lightkeeper resident on the site.

Changes to the Light Station over the years have corresponded with advancements in maritime transportation and navigational technologies and with the development of the Port of Vancouver. The site is important for its association with these technological changes, including the use of the Type F diaphone fog alarm installed in 1912, designed in Canada, which became the national standard for lighthouses; the addition of radio technology in 1935; and the installation of electricity in 1962 which replaced the previous steam boiler. The longevity of the equipment deployed is also significant with some of the original components lasting into the 1980s.

The site is important for its association with the programme of replacement of lights, foghorns and lighthouse keepers with automated electronic equipment. Point Atkinson became one of the first light stations on the West Coast to experiment with new automated technologies. It became fully automated in 1996, contributing to the end of the traditional role of Canada's light keepers on the coast. Some of Point Atkinson's light keepers have achieved renown, including Walter Erwin, who received the Imperial Service medal in 1911 and Don Graham, whose books on coastal lighthouses published in 1985-86 have inspired public awareness of these landmark beacons.

Social and community value is found in the artifact collection and interpretive material in the radio room, reflecting the ongoing community interest in preserving and presenting this iconic landmark.

## **Character-defining Elements**

- Site and Landscape
  - Granite outcropping forming irregular shoreline of rocky points and coves
  - Location of the lighthouse and its relationship to Burrard Inlet and Lighthouse Park
  - Siting of the lighthouse on a granite outcrop
  - Location and relationship of the buildings on the site
  - Stone retaining walls
  - Concrete retaining walls
  - Stone wall and entry gates
  - Circulation pathways connecting the lighthouse to the residential area and the lighthouse site to the military buildings and park
  - Concrete steps and railing
  - Drainage ditch
  - Open lawns
  - Natural vegetation on and surrounding the site
  - Views to Vancouver and Burrard Inlet
  - Remains of domestic landscaping including gardens and traces of vegetable and ornamental plant material
- Buildings and Structures
  - Reinforced concrete lighthouse structure
  - Three narrow windows on each of two faces of the hexagonal tower
  - Red iron lantern room, glass panels and red iron cupola atop the concrete platform at the top of the tower
  - Red and white colour scheme of the tower and the ancillary buildings
  - Remains of the foundations of the original lighthouse at the base of the tower
  - Circulation features including walkways and concrete steps
  - Red pipe-rail railings
  - Ancillary buildings, including the two residences, radio room, utility shed and block house
  - Wharf
  - Wooden boardwalk
  - Boathouse
  - Working navigational, scientific, and communication instrumentation
  - Buildings associated with military use including the bunkhouse, gun emplacements, the mess house and the searchlight bunker (the bunkhouse, mess house and searchlight bunker are not located within the Light Station site)
    - siting
    - cedar shingle siding
    - wood windows
- Other Elements
  - Artifacts and interpretive material in the Radio Room