

Signal Hill National Historic Park  
**Cabot Tower**  
St. Johns, Newfoundland

## **HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

Cabot Tower was constructed in 1900 to the designs of William Howe Greene. It was built as a monument to John Cabot's 1497 voyage to North America and to the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign. The tower housed signaling functions until 1958, and gained additional prestige in the communications field by receiving Marconi's first Transatlantic transmission of the human voice in 1920. Due to fire and explosion in 1918, interiors were extensively replaced in 1919. Interiors again were extensively replaced in 1977 and 1984 to control moisture penetration. See FHBRO Building Report 88-43.

### **Reason for Designation**

The Cabot Tower was designated Classified because of its important historical associations with the development of communications and its environmental context. The tower is a handsome architectural design, particularly the exterior, which exhibits fine materials and craftsmanship. It continues to be an important landmark in the region.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of the building resides in the entirety of its exterior elevations and those aspects of its interior layout and fabric that relate to its function as a signal and communications tower. The siting and high visibility of the building and its relationship with its site is also significant.

The Cabot Tower is built in the late-Gothic revival style. It is a highly integrated design - its form, secondary elements, materials, and the manner in which they are worked and assembled contribute to its solid, enduring appearance. Its solid and monumental appearance is reinforced by the use of large blocks of stone, irregularly coursed sandstone, buttresses at the corners, crenellations and other Scottish-Baronial details. The design is highly appropriate to its function and site.

The façades have survived relatively intact, except for dismantling and rebuilding some 200 square feet of the tower walls and two feet of the top of the turret in 1961. It is important that all exterior components be carefully preserved.

Repairs or restoration, if needed, should be carried out after meticulous analysis of present conditions, and should be historically accurate in terms of materials, detailing, and design. The three masts - now removed - were an

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integral part of the structure and its function. Considering the association of the building with signaling and communications, they could be installed to their original locations on top of the tower with the original method, avoiding any destruction or future threat of destruction to the original fabric.

Almost all of the interior details and finishes have been replaced several times and as recently as 1984. Providing as-found drawings and other documentation of the 1919 finishes are sufficiently detailed, reconstruction of the missing elements and restoration would be an appropriate approach to refurbishing the interior. Otherwise, an alternate approach, compatible with the heritage character of the building would be appropriate. Reversible interventions with minimal impact on original fabric are recommended in all cases. Changes to accommodate new functional requirements should be designed so they are distinct but sympathetic to the original design, so as to preserve and enhance the historical and architectural integrity of the structure. Future interventions should not alter the inter-relationship between the tower and its setting.

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