

North Canal Lighthouse Station.

"The lighthouse and the lightship appeal to the interests and better instinct of man because they are symbolic of never-ceasing watchfulness, of steadfast endurance in every exposure, of widespread helpfulness." - George R. Putnam, the first Commissioner of Lighthouses, U.S. Lighthouse Service, 1906-1935

Gazette article (date unknown) states: In 1860, a corporation of private investors was formed to dig a 2 mile channel through a sand and tamarack swamp open to Lake Superior on the north end of Portage Lake. In 1861, the 2 1/4 mile long, 100 foot wide and 12 foot deep canal was completed.

The government constructed 2 break walls of rock, angled to the shoreline and 2 piers to the entrance of the channel. They were 100 feet apart. The navigational opening was 60 feet. In storms this was difficult to maneuver into the canal and lily pond. "It was like threading a needle" as steamer captains said. That is why so many shipwrecks occurred at the entry and the Life Saving Station was created on the east side of canal in 1885. (Author: west side 3/4 mile back on canal.. moved to east side in 1902)

Temporary lights were installed on outer ends. Due to currents and the wave action of the lake, the canal always would be subject to sand and silt affecting its depth and formation of sand bars.

Toll money collected was devoured by problems and upkeep. The waterway went thru politics and legal problems. Full operation and maintenance of the waterway was taken over by the US Army Corps of Engineers. In 1891 tolls were eliminated.

A light station was built in 1874-1875. It was a large gabled 2 story brick dwelling with attached square brick tower 43 feet high. The tower lantern room housed a 3 1/2 order fixed white Fresnel lens. The east and west break walls had fixed red lights on 32 foot skeleton towers, as did the east pier head. The west pier head had a 23 foot high tower. The lighthouse housed 2 families. They were on 5 day style lights but keepers needed to come w/ rowboat to clean and refuel.

Three keepers at the station maintained the lights and fog signal. The station consisted of the two-keeper dwelling, assistant keeper's house, brick oil house was 20 feet westerly of the post, two privies, a barn (later a garage), boathouse and fog signal house and system.



UPPER ENTRY LIGHTHOUSE
TAKEN DOWN AROUND 1937



Canal Light House near Houghton, Mich. P. 1023

KEEPERS:

First Keeper in 1875 was Peter Malone. He resigned after 2 years. There was only a crude road to the lighthouse. Isolated. Lonely. Oskar was being formed in 1875.

John Malone took over for 2 years and was transferred.

Wm. Stevens came from Isle Royale Menagerie Island.

Early POLK directory lists lighthouse keeper - Wm Mungo

A Daily Mining Gazette article states: Noah J. Bennetts (born c. 1864) was the lighthouse keeper in 1906. 1910 census has him at North Canal.

Noah James Bennetts was lighthouse keeper in 1920 census. He is age 57. He immigrated in 1869. Can read and write. Born in England. His wife is Susan age 47. Children are: Robert 19 in Coast Guard (probably across the canal from lighthouse at Portage Cst Gd), Dorothy M age 10, and Arthur 6. All born in Michigan. Other children were Carol/Cora, and Ernest who had left home in this census.

When the lighthouse was torn down in mid 1930's for widening of canal he retired age c. 66 years old

Noah's brother Thomas J Bennetts was lighthouse keeper at same time period at Eagle River and there until the lighthouse was decommissioned in 1908 and transferred to Manitou Island light and later to Eagle Harbor Lighthouse until retirement in 1926.

Sidelines: Thomas J's son Thomas W was Life Saving Service surfman in the 1913 rescue on the Waldo. Thomas W's daughter Ethel marries Chester Tucker who was in the 1913 Waldo rescue with his father Charles Tucker who was Portage LSS Keeper for 21 years 1890 to 1912.

Noah and Thomas's parents were Noah J Senior and Elizabeth Bennetts. They had 4 descendants in the LSS/Coast Guard/Lighthouse Stations – Noah J. Junior, Robert Bennetts, Thomas J, Thomas W, and Ethel Bennetts Tucker.

Bob Olson (son of early settler Alex Olson) shares: The lighthouse on our side of canal held three families to work the light. One was Jones. She was a schoolteacher at Canal School. The second family was the Bennetts family with Mr. as the Head person. He had son Burton (?Ernest, Robert, or Arthur) that was in the same grade with me. The third family was the Brock family.

The fog horn building was separate building.

Bob's sister Evelyn shares in her document: There were 3 non-Finnish families who tended the lighthouse, which was on Lake Superior, a mile from where we lived. There were not many summer days especially in the morning that we didn't hear the fog horn blowing.

Don Hermanson shares:

There was a North Entry brick lighthouse that was torn down around 1936 (Author: due to widening the canal) by my grandpa Oscar Hermanson and my dad. They salvaged all the bricks and sold them, I remember chipping the mortar off them to ready them for sale. Piles of bricks are still in the bush there behind. My dad said a house near Everts Motors in Hancock was built from those bricks.

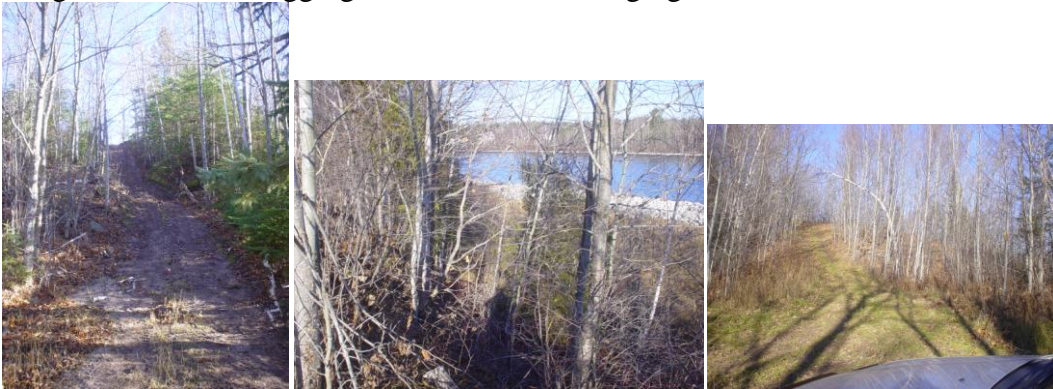
I don't know if I told you this but that metal green building down the hill by the Stanton Park road was the old fog horn building and it was on the end of the breakwater.



My grandpa moved it where it is today by pulling it with the dump truck on big wooden rollers. It was later "Haps Tavern" and even later they fixed nets in there in the winter.

Also that cabin next to the building was Coast Guard, it was quarters for workers and then a garage for Coast Guard vehicles, and it was also moved. In summer 2009 it was torn down.

The lighthouse was razed because the canal was being widened to that area; hence the hill to the right of road was diggings from the canal dredging.



Another thing originally there was no entry at the north end. It was an overland portage from very near where you live (Osma Plat Road), a little north at Lily Pond just past the creek on

the east.



Everything moved out the south entry, and was the Portage River; in fact the lighthouse on the south entry was the Portage River Lighthouse.



After it was dredged then it was a canal, hence "portage canal or north canal entry".
(Read topic on Dredging the Canal)

Keweenaw Lights was my first video project I produced and it's kind of crude but it's what it is.

Another story I don't have much info on but my Grandma had a dance hall down there by the park road during the digging of the canal. She had bands play and once brought a colored band from Chicago to play there. Eventually someone burned it down, probably some folks not liking it, however she rebuilt.

There was also a sawmill down there that my Grandpa owned for sawing the lumber to build the green house, garage, barns etc.

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In 1935, according to Richard Garnell (son of early settler Alex Garnell), the original lighthouse was torn down and moved back when the width of the canal was expanded.

1950. The Old light station was replaced with an automated 50 foot square steel tower whose height with crib and concrete base is 82 feet above the level of Lake Superior.



See the light in the eye of roots. Photo by Melissa A. Koski, daughter of researcher of this article.

Ray McClellan who sells property for State Wide Realty, shares: When we moved here in 1974 the National Park Service owned the property that once had the lighthouse and life saving station/Coast Guard. They sold to Bob Durocher who sold it to Roy Montroy. This is when the property was being sold by State Wide Real Estate. We had to research the property. We found that there were 5 fuel tanks in the ground that had to be taken out. Must have been oil for the boiler. A 1000 gallon tank was for the house. Tony Burcar took out all tanks.. one tank was 3/4 full of fluid. That was pumped out and taken away. There was a footing for a tower. The 3 car garage had a generator system. Montroy sold to two men and about 4-5 years ago the house burned.

A light existing only in memories...

Portage Lake ship canal light station

By Donald L. Nelson
for the Mag

The Keweenaw Peninsula as we know it today would not exist if not for the discovery of the richest veins of copper in the United States during the 1840s. Communities sprung up all over the Keweenaw where the many mines were. Getting the processed copper out of the Keweenaw was a problem due to the lack of good harbors.

A lake (Portage Lake), some 17 miles long was within the peninsula, having a twisting, shallow river (Portage River) exiting into Keweenaw Bay at the south end. The communities, later cities, of Houghton and Hancock were midway. They would be the best places to ship the copper. Crushers and smelters converted the ore to ingots. These were located convenient to the many mines. The upper and lower entries to Portage Lake would have to be opened to enable access.

In 1860, a corporation of private investors was formed to dig a two-mile channel through a sand and tamarack swamp open to Lake Superior on the north end of Portage Lake. In 1861, the 2 1/4 mile long, 100-foot wide and 12-foot deep canal was completed. The corporation was to charge tolls to regain the investment of \$1,250,000. Toll money collected was devoured by problems and upkeep. Due to politics and legal problems, not a cent was ever recovered, bankrupting those involved.

The government constructed two breakwalls of rock, angled to the shoreline and two piers to the entrance of the channel. Temporary lights were installed at the outer ends. Due to the currents and the wave action of the lake, the canal always would be subject to sand and silt affecting its depth and the formation of sand bars. The natural flow of water through the ship canal was north to south so dredging would be ongoing at the upper entry.

After years of transfers, wrangling and legal maneuvering, full operation and maintenance of the



Portage Ship Canal Lighthouse. Circa 1915. Photo courtesy, Don Hermanson.

waterway was taken over by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In 1891, tolls were eliminated.

In 1874 a large two-story, two-keeper brick dwelling was built with an attached 43-foot high square brick tower. The tower lantern room housed a 3 1/2 order fixed white Fresnel

lens. The east and west breakwalls had fixed red lights on 32-foot skeleton towers, as did the east pier head. The west pier head to the canal had a 23-foot high tower with a fixed

LIGHTHOUSE.....see page 5

In the mid-1920's, the fog signal building was moved to shore, up on the bank, just to the north of the main lighthouse and was changed to compressed air diaphones. The west pier light was also removed from the pier and replaced with a light on a skeleton tower.

A harbor of refuge and dock, locally known as Lily Pond, was constructed by widening an area one mile in from the entrance with docking for vessels during storms on the big lake. A like refuge was also built at the Lower Entry. In the early days of shipping on the lakes, it was not uncommon for these refuges and Portage Lake to be filled with vessels waiting out a storm.

The ship canal light station remained much the same until 1934 when it was determined that the canal would have to be widened and deepened to accommodate larger vessels and improve entry. In 1935 the inner piers were removed and demolition of the lighthouse was begun. The canal would be widened to 500 feet at the entrance, tapering to 300 feet at the entrance to Portage Lake, with 25-foot minimum depths. By 1936 nothing remained of the original light station. The lighthouse was demolished with the bricks dumped on private land (still remaining) a mile or so from the original site. Even the ground it sat on had been removed to accommodate the widened canal.

The assistant keeper's house was also torn down. The garage was moved and remodeled to housekeepers only and not their families, until the new triplex keepers dwelling was built. When this dwelling was completed, the former converted garage was sold and again moved to a new location and still stands today as a privately owned cottage. The fog signal building was also sold and moved a mile back. Over the years it served as a store, a bar, and today is used for private storage.

A replacement aero-beacon light on a tower was placed atop a new small cement building on a hill on the west side of the widened canal. This building housed the air compressors for the diaphone fog horns along with a generator. This was not intended as a permanent replacement. New quarters were built to accommodate the three keepers and their families. Another building was constructed to house a workshop, garage, watch-standing, and radio beacon equipment.

In 1949 preparation began for a new 82-foot high, modern steel lighthouse to be built on a cylindrical crib on the east side at the end of a rebuilt rock-rubble break wall. A modern optic showed a green flash (the west break wall has a flashing red light on a pole). It was completed in 1950 and was operated remotely by keepers. It also housed the new trumpet type air fog signal system. This tower is fully electrified. In the 1970's, it was automated and a radio beacon was installed. The Coast Guard keepers were reassigned. A few years later the keeper's quarters, other buildings and property were sold to a private party. Today the automated light remains that way. The Coast Guard station was abandoned in 1991 and temporarily placed at Hancock just to the west of the Houghton/Hancock Bridge. The bridge provides the only access to the Keweenaw Peninsula, which is technically an island. A new modern Coast Guard station was built at Dollar Bay, east of the bridge in 1997.

The North Entry, which once was a lively area with a manned light and Coast Guard station, now is inactive except for the modern automated crib light, fog horn and radio beacon. McLain State Park encompasses many acres on the east side near the canal entrance. The west side has a small park, with the balance of the area being private homes or property.

Another era of maritime history is now gone. Today the down-sized lake freighter fleet seldom uses the once-busy Keweenaw Waterway. The modern, large 850-foot plus freighters cannot navigate the waterway, and with modern equipment and advanced sea-worthiness, there is little need for refuge. The mines no longer operate, so shipping from the Keweenaw no longer exists.

Today, pleasure craft, the Isle Royale National Park vessel Ranger III, an occasional freighter and an excursion vessel only use the canal. Maybe, one day, the Houghton/Hancock area will return as a stopover to passenger ships, this is being contemplated. In the past, passenger ships were regular visitors. The 1874 lighthouse is gone with few people left who even remember its existence.

For uniforms see

http://www.uscg.mil/history/regulations/1893_LHS_Uniform_Regs.asp

http://www.uscg.mil/history/regulations/1920_LHS_Uniform_Regs.asp

How do you get copies of Coast Guard logbooks? Life-Saving Service station logbooks and reports, 1871-1915: Coast Guard Station logbooks and other records, 1915 to approximately twenty years ago from today:

<http://www.uscg.mil/history/faqs/LOGBOOKS.asp>

With a mission statement calling for "*the preservation of lighthouses, the stories of those who kept them, and developing a new generation of preservationists*",

<http://www.gllka.com/who/index.htm>

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