

THE LIGHTHOUSES OF GRAND LAKE ST. MARYS, OHIO

On October 6, 1993, Nancy and I made our first visit to the lake for the purpose of looking for the lights. The lake is in West Central Ohio. From State Route 75, travel West on State Route 33 to State Route 364. At State Route 364, turn South, until you reach State Route 703. State Route 703 is the Northern route of the lake. Turning right takes you towards Celina and the lights and left will take you to St. Marys. These are the largest cities on the lake. We started by stopping in the Grand Lake St. Marys State Park office to see what they could tell us. We not only received the directions to the lights but also met a young lady, that was very much interested in the lights, and provided a supply of the parks new folder showing the locations of both lights.

From the State Park, we turned West, left on State Route 703, passed the golf course, and located Northwood. Northwood is half way between St. Marys and Celina. It is a private residential area, but there are no gates or guard house. We followed Northwood Dr. to the end and there we found an outstanding light. So I parked the car off the road and started taking pictures. Being caught up with my own viewing, I did not notice that the owner, Mrs. Mary Jo McKirnan, had come out of the house and was talking to Nancy. As soon as I realized where I was, I went back and joined them. She had noticed our lighthouse society bumper stickers and came out to talk. After spending maybe an hour, we had not only found a new light but a good friend and a lighthouse project. Later that day, I met Mary Jo's husband, Mr. Dan KcKirnan. The project was to find out more about the light then I heard at our first meeting.

So today after two months, several trips from, some of 30 miles and two of 70 miles and lots of interviews with all sorts of interesting people, libraries, museums and newspapers this is what I know so far:

The lighthouse's official name, according to the National Register of Historic Places as of August 23, 1982, is the Grand Lake St. Marys Lighthouse. At that time it was the only lighthouse on an inland water lake in the state of Ohio. Shortly after, the city of Celina built a light. With two lights now on the lake most people refer to the light as the Northwood Lighthouse. As I said above it is owned by Dan and Mary Jo McKirnan of Northwood.

The original owner and builder of the light was Mr. William Jaspersen of St. Marys, OH. Mr. Jaspersen had the light built to resemble the Eddystone Lighthouse of England, one of the things that makes it an interesting light. Mr. Jaspersen was born in Saginaw, Michigan in 1875. The family moved to St. Marys when he was 13, where he went to school for two years and then he went to Europe for two years. He went to college at Florida State College in Lake City, FL. In later years, he traveled to England on visits and perhaps business. All this leads to why you build a lighthouse on an inland lake that looks like Eddystone Light. I believe in his travels he liked lighthouses and when he decided to build a light, he chose

Eddystone. All indications point to the fact that the light was built, to be used as a sales 'tool', to sell houses at Northwood. There is a sale brochure, Northwood on Lake St. Marys, dated 1926.

The Tower was built of stone, metal and cement. The tower was built in 1924. Who it was that did the foundation, the stone work or the metal framework, I was not successful at finding out. But the cement work was contracted to Joseph Jagoditz of New Bremen, OH. The son of Joseph Jagoditz, also Joseph, was 16 at that time and worked with his father on the light. He still lives in Norwood, OH. He is very proud of the work they did on the light and still would to climb the seventy foot tower one more time. And then says "but Mrs. McKirnan wouldn't allow him". By the way the pictures of the outside indicate a spiral stairway, wrong, it has a wooden painter's ladder that goes straight up. It is fastened to the interior cross members of the metal framework.

The lantern was added the Spring of 1925. The lantern was built by John F. Gross, but I have yet to find out where his business was located. It was made of copper and stood thirteen feet high. It weighed around 600 pounds. It was interesting, from a newspaper clipping, that on the day the lantern was placed on top, it was almost lost. "A sharp slap of wind" hit the lantern as Tommy Taylor and the crew from the Ohio Service Corp. were elevating it to the top of the tower.

The last and best part is that there is a fifth order, 375 mm, Fresnel Lens in the lantern. According to the Northwood on Lake St. Marys booklet, the lens was obtained from the United States Government and was taken from a lighthouse in Cuba. The book also states "It is operated under government lease from April 1st to November 1st,". On an inland lake, this is questionable. But regardless, the lens is there and an outstanding attribute to the lighthouse.

The light was first lit in the Spring of 1925. We know of course it was not operated during the World War II but I have a newspaper article, dated August 4, 1945, that states "Northwood's beacon light was burning again last night, the first time in several years." From there on there doesn't seem to be any record as to when it was lighted or not lighted. It has not been lighted over the last 20 years, except for very brief periods. The good news is that there is a chance that it could be relighted but there are a good many things to be considered before this could happen.

When visiting this light please remember it is on private property in a restricted residential area, please honor all the residents privacy and property. The light can be easily seen and photographed from the street and as always by boat.

Now on to Celina and the next lighthouse. Just follow State Route 703 West until you intersect State Route 127. Turn left, this leads you to the lake and you can not miss the light. When I first started the gathering of this information, I felt this would not be an interesting light to work on since it was so new. I soon changed my mind. I talked to several people before I finally got to Jim Hone. Jim is a local business man who not only had all the newspaper clippings, pictures and drawings, he also had all the stories behind the stories. Jim was the person who oversaw the

Northwood Light -What I know to date - December 16, 1993

- 1- Listed in National Reg. of Historic Places as Grand Lake St. Marys Lighthouse.
 - A- listed in August of 1982.
 - B- only inland water lighthouse in the State of Ohio.
 - a- until 1987, I believe, when the Celina Rotary Club built another light at the other end of Grand Lake St. Marys in Celina, Ohio.
- 2- Owned by Dan and Mary Jo McKirnan
- 3- Originally owned and built by William Jaspersen of St. Marys, OH.
 - A- the light was built to resemble the Eddystone Lighthouse of England.
 - B- Mr. Jaspersen was born in Saginaw, MI in 1875
 - C- moved to St. Marys at the age of 13 and went to school for two years.
 - D- he then received some education in Europe.
 - E- it is believed the family traveled to England on several occasions.
 - F- perhaps this is how he become familiar with lighthouses.
 - G- and the reason for building the light? It was used as a sales tool, to promote the sales of homes in Northwood on Lake St. Marys. Some of the information for this report is taken for the sales booklet produced by Mr. Jaspersen. This booklet was published in 1926. When the light was built there were no houses, it was all wooded area.
- 4- The base, the metal frame and cement tower work was done in 1924.
 - A- who done installation of the base and metal work are unknown, as yet.
 - B- the cement work was done by Joseph Jagoditz of New Bremen, OH.
 - a- a son, Joseph, who was 16 at time and worked on the tower still lives in Norwood, OH.
 - C- the completed tower was 70 feet high
- 5- The lantern was put on in April of 1925.
 - A- built by John F. Gross.
 - B- mounted by Tommie Taylor of Ohio Service Corp.
 - C- it was copper, 13 feet high and weighed 600 pounds.
- 6- The lens is a Fresnel lens (a fifth order, 375 mm lens).
 - A- secured from the United States Government.
 - B- taken from a lighthouse off the coast of Cuba.
 - C- was operated under government lease from April 1st to November 1st.
- 7- The light was lit sometime in the Spring of 1925.
 - A- the light was not used during World War II
 - B- relighted on August 3, 1945.
 - C- the light was turned off again at some unknown time or for what reason.
 - D- there is a chance it will be relighted