

OHIO'S INLAND LAKE LIGHTHOUSES OF GRAND LAKE

by Don Kohr

On October 6, 1993 my wife Nancy and I made our first visit to the Grand Lake in St. Marys, Ohio for the purpose of looking for lighthouses. We started by stopping in the Grand Lake St. Mary's State Park office to see what they could tell us. We not only received directions to the lights but also met a wonderful lady that was very much interested in the lights and provided us with a supply of the park's new brochure showing the location of both lights.

That day led to a lighthouse odyssey to learn more about the lighthouses. After two months, several trips of many miles, and lots of interviews with all sorts of interesting people, libraries, museums, and newspapers, this is what I learned.

The lighthouse official name, according to the National Register of Historic Places as of August 23rd, 1982 is the Grand Lake St. Mary's Lighthouse. At that time it was the only inland water lighthouse in the state of Ohio. Shortly thereafter the City of Celina built a lighthouse. Now with two lights on the lake most people refer to the original light as the Northwood Lighthouse. It is owned now by Dan and Mary Jo McKirnan of Northwood, Ohio.

The original owner and builder of the light was William Jasperson who was born in Saginaw Michigan in 1875 and moved to St. Mary's when he was 13 years old. All indications point to the fact that the lighthouse was built as a sales "tool" to sell houses at Northwood as is indicated on a sales brochure dated 1926.

The 70 foot high structure was built of stone, metal, and cement in 1924. From its looks, it would appear that the lighthouse would have a spiral stairway, wrong, it has a wooden painter's ladder that goes straight up. The lantern room, added

in the spring of 1925, is made of copper at a height of 13 feet, with a weight of 600 pounds, was built by a John F. Gross. An old newspaper clipping tells how the top was almost lost. "A sharp slap of wind hit the lantern room as Tommy Taylor and the crew from Ohio Service Corp. were elevating it to the top of the tower."

There is a 375mm Fresnel lens in the lantern room. According to a Northwood 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." The light was first lit in the spring of 1925.

It was not operated during World War II, but I located a newspaper clipping dated August 4, 1945 that states "Northwood's beacon light was burning again last night, the first time in several years." From then on there doesn't seem to be any record of when it was lighted or not lighted. However, it has not been lighted for the last 20 years, except for very brief periods.

Now on to Celina Lighthouse, which being so new, I thought would not be an interesting light. I soon changed my mind. After talking with several people I met up with Jim Howe a local businessman, who not only had all the newspaper clippings, pictures and drawings, he also had the stories behind the stories. He was the person who oversaw the construction, did most of the drawings and most of the legwork in

getting the light built.

In August of 1985, the Celina Rotary Club presented plans for a lighthouse to be built on an abandoned concrete water intake for the city. On approval, they began raising funds and the project was underway.

The tower was built of brick, however something happened, the tower ended up a little mis-shaped. To correct this it was decided to stucco over the brick and the problem was solved. The original plan used a wooden platform over the top with a regular exterior fixture. After that was in place, it was decided it would not be adequate and it took some time to decide on a new lantern.

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Northwood Lighthouse