

oil drawn up through a single wick that ran up from the bottom of the lamp housing.

Keeper's Duties from Dusk to Dawn

The keeper and his assistant(s) at Monroe Harbor Lighthouse kept the light burning from dusk to dawn. The keeper or his assistant on duty would carry a heavy one-gallon container of whale oil in one hand and hold onto the iron handrail with the other one as he continued his long journey up the spiral staircase to the hatchway at the bottom of the lantern room. Once inside the lantern room, he would smother the flame, refill the lamp, and wipe the soot off the ruby chimney and Fresnel lens. Next he would relight the lamp and close the door on the Fresnel lens. Once the light was burning brightly, he would venture outside the iron lantern room or stay inside depending on the weather. As part of his duties, he would spend the next four to six hours walking around the walkway and gazing across the horizon for vessels in distress.



A fourth-order Fresnel lens, similar to that used at Monroe Harbor, on display at Admiralty Inlet Lighthouse, Washington. USLHS archive photo.

Keepers' Quarters

In 1849 the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse keepers' quarters was constructed on the beach near the water's edge. The 1½-story dwelling was built from rough split stone that measured 34 feet long by 20 feet wide with the interior ceiling height listed as 8 feet. There

Right: Peter Gussenbauer in his keeper's uniform. National Archives photo.

were four rooms in this dwelling. There was a wing built off the side of the dwelling that measured 9 feet wide by 13 feet long and was attached to the keepers' quarters.

Keeper John Paxton

John Paxton was the Monroe County sheriff, a grocer in the early part of the 1830s and was Monroe's city assessor from 1835 till 1839. He was appointed keeper-in-charge of the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse in 1853. On February 26, 1818, Paxton and his wife, Thoe-tiste Lasselle, also from Monroe, Michigan, were married. The couple had 10 children over their long marriage. Paxton remained as keeper of the lighthouse until sometime in 1855.

Author's Note: I remember reading somewhere that the Paxton children spent happy times living and playing near the keepers' quarters.

Lighthouse and Quarters in Disrepair

In 1868 a written report by the secretary of the Treasury talked about the conditions at the lighthouse. According to the report:

"The wooden tower at Monroe Harbor Lighthouse needs repainting, the lantern room and the deck are both leaking badly. There is no covered passage way between the tower and keeper's quarters. The wood dwelling requires extensive repairs, planking on the pier also needs to be removed and replaced."

The Monroe Harbor Lighthouse keeper's logbook stated all the necessary repairs that were stated in the 1868 inspection report were completed by the end of the 1869 navigational season.

In 1884 the lighthouse and the keepers' quarters were rebuilt in the exact same location as the original structures. The new keepers' quarters had nine rooms and many other amenities that made life a little easier for the keepers. The boathouse was located near the inner end of the north pier (measuring 50 feet wide by 93 feet long) and was situated some 1,400 feet from the lighthouse. The boathouse measured 20 feet by 12 feet 6 inches in plan. The rescue boat was hoisted in and out of the river by block and tackle. The round iron oil house and stone foundation were 20 feet to the rear of the keepers' quarters. The original oil room was located in the



keepers' quarters and was capable of holding 45 five-gallon containers of oil.

Keeper Peter Gussenbauer

Peter Gussenbauer was born on June 10, 1842, in Monroe, Michigan. He married his first wife, Eliza (Rathburn) Gussenbauer, from Fairfield, Michigan. The couple had one son named John R. Gussenbauer who was born in Toledo, Ohio. At the time of his son's birth, Gussenbauer was stationed at the Toledo Harbor Lighthouse, located off the shores of Toledo, Ohio. In 1864 Eliza Gussenbauer passed away.

Over time, Gussenbauer fell in love and married his second wife, Marian Winslow ("Bumper") Gussenbauer from Monroe, Michigan. During the couples enduring marriage, they had two children. In 1872 their son, Forrest, was born and their daughter, Eliza, followed a few years later.

Gussenbauer's service time at Toledo Harbor Lighthouse was coming to an end and his transfer was imminent. In 1888 Gussenbauer was appointed keeper-in-charge of the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse. He was well known by every ship's captains, sailors, and yachtsmen who traveled along the Great Lakes from Detroit, Michigan, to Toledo, Ohio. He was also known to be very blunt. He would always have a witty remark. He told humorous stories and he had a winning repartee.

Gussenbauer was always welcoming to

those who visited the lighthouse. He always made time to explain his duties, even though there was a great deal on his plate. He was careful about accommodating those who sought numerous favors from him. He would grant them when asked, providing he was in the position to do so.

In 1902 Gussenbauer was responsible for watching over some of the additional repairs needed in and around the harbor light. He also supervised the replacement of the wooden pilings around the deteriorated cribbing.

On April 9, 1904, Gussenbauer, better known as “Uncle Peter” was struck down by a massive stroke. As a result he was left paralyzed but able to recognize those by his bedside. He passed away at 11 a.m. in his bedroom. His funeral service was really short and took place at the lighthouse. Once the service was completed, his wooden casket was transported from the lighthouse to the river where a charter tugboat was waiting to transport him to the mainland. His casket was loaded aboard and delivered upriver to an area dock in Monroe, where the casket was removed from the deck of the tugboat by a few members from the local Masonic lodge. Those lodge members placed his wooden casket aboard a horse-drawn hearse. Once the casket was secured, the procession made its way to Woodlawn Cemetery where Gussenbauer was laid to rest with honors.

Keeper William Irvin Hayes

Captain William Irvin Hayes was born on August 21, 1841. His parents were Wilson and Harriett (McVanon) Hayes. Hayes married Hannah E. Shook. In 1904 Hayes was transferred from Turtle Island Light Station to Monroe Harbor Lighthouse where he was appointed acting keeper.

Author’s Note: Hayes was the last keeper at Turtle Island Lighthouse. On August 1, 1916, he passed away at the age of 74.

On February 1, 1909, the lighthouse was inspected by Charles Bartlett, chief clerk” and the superintendent from Norris Works. The two men deemed the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse and all the other associated structures as healthy.

Cistern and Lake Water

Situated near the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse was an old wood-lined cistern with a hand pump that was just outside the keepers’ quarters. The wood vessel held



Keeper William Irvin Hayes. National Archives photo.

approximately 20 barrels of water. The rain-water from the cistern was used for multiple purposes around the lighthouse. Domestic water was pulled up from Lake Erie. Many of the keepers or their assistants would dip the iron bucket that was attached to the handle by a rope into the lake. Once the bucket was full they would pull it up and carry it back to their quarters. The men would use this lake water as a source for bathing, cleaning, drinking, or washing dishes. There was a small wooden privy that was constructed on northeast corner of the harbor pier.

Author’s Note: At some point in time, a gas light system was installed on top of a steel skeletal tower. The steel structure was built on the pier alongside the lighthouse.



Monroe Pier Lighthouse, circa, 1910. National Archives photo.

Lighthouse Decommissioned and Sold

In 1916 the Monroe Harbor Lighthouse was automated by the Lighthouse Service and August H. Lauers was appointed keeper-in-charge. Keeper Lauers only served at the lighthouse for a little less than four years. According to records, once the light was automated, Keeper Lauers was transferred to another duty station. Sometime after 1920, the old oil room inside the keepers’ quarters was converted into an office and storage area for spare lamps. These areas were used by other lighthouse personnel when they serviced the light. Approximately two years later the lighthouse was decommissioned.

In late July of 1922, a wrecking company from Toledo, Ohio, was contracted by a young man. This individual purchased the abandoned lighthouse and structures at a public auction for the sum of \$35. The men from the wrecking company dismantled the lighthouse and other structures and then began the process of loading all the materials aboard a lumber barge called *Three Brothers*.

Author’s Note: What happened to the materials that made up the lighthouse and other structures that were associated with the pier light is still unknown today, along with the barge’s final destination.

Author’s Final Thoughts

Today the only remnants of the Otter Creek Lighthouse and Monroe Harbor Lighthouse that were once situated near the shores of LaPlaisance Bay and the River Raisin are sketchy at best. The stories and memories from long ago are still vivid in the minds of those family members whose relatives once served

or by looking into the files of the National Archives, but beyond that: “These Lights are Lost Forever!”

If you would like to learn more about Otter Creek or Monroe Harbor lighthouses or others lighthouses along the Great Lakes, visit my Google blog called “Great Lakes Lighthouse Historian” or check my Google website called “Great Lakes Historian.”

MICHIGAN LIGHTHOUSES ALONG LAKE ERIE

Memories from Otter Creek & Monroe Harbor

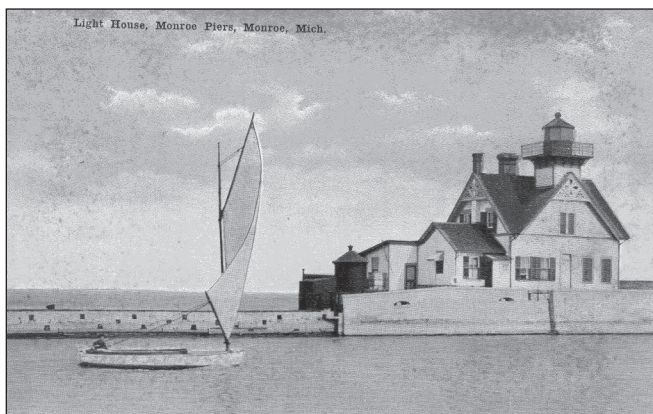
By Scott W. Bundschuh

Otter Creek Lighthouse and Monroe Harbor Lighthouse once stood as navigational beacons located along the shores of Lake Erie in Michigan. Each of these lighthouses once stood near or close to what was deemed back then as the “shallow waters” near the city of Monroe. These two old beacons were in close proximity to the mouth of LaPlaisance Bay and River Raisin (Riviere aux Raisin). These two waterways once played a key role in guiding vessels into the shallow bay that as time went on was referred to as “Manmade Harbor.”

The mouth of the River Raisin was quite shallow as it wound its way along the marshes and sandy shoals of LaPlaisance Bay. From all accounts there were ongoing problems that continued to plague each and every vessel that attempted to maneuver its way in or out of the bay. Some of the captains within the shipping community stated:

“When the winds blew out of the West, the water level in Lake Erie had a tendency to drop off anywhere from three to five feet.”

When this situation arose, the only types of vessel that could safely navigate through the waterway were small boats. This situation made it rather difficult for passengers to access Monroe. Vessels inbound from Lake Erie would dock at LaPlaisance Bay and unload passengers, their luggage, and cargo. Passengers would then make their way towards Monroe’s docks. Once on the wooden docks, passengers would stroll along until they boarded horse-drawn wagons or made their way onto horse-drawn railcars bound for Monroe. Some passengers would



Monroe Pier Lighthouse. Postcard courtesy of Paul E. Petosky, author of *Postmarks from the Past*.

go about conducting some business in Monroe; others would take up their new lives in this Michigan coast town. There were some passengers who would make their way to their next port of call.

In 1834 a petition for \$100,000 was presented to Congress requesting a new waterway. The petition would fund a large dredging operation to open up the mouth of the River Raisin into Lake Erie. Within days of its submission, Congress approved the petition and the canal project was underway. The canal would be just about four miles from the original entrance point into LaPlaisance Bay. After multiple stages of dredging operations, the United States Army Corps of Engineers finally completed the canal in 1843.

Author's Note: Here you have an artificial/manmade harbor located in Michigan along the shores of Lake Erie. The new canal was designed to help ships and people easily make their way to the mainland. The other thing the canal did was aid in the overall development of the city of Monroe.

Now that we have taken a look at the waterways' effect on those in and around Mon-

roe, let's talk about the navigational beacons (Otter Creek and Monroe Harbor) that will eventually be lost and forgotten.

Otter Creek Lighthouse

Otter Creek Lighthouse was the first lighthouse located near the city of Monroe. It was located on the west side of the lake at Otter Creek Point. On some of the maps of Monroe, Otter Creek was also shown as Riviere au Loutre.

In 1829 the cost to construct Otter Creek Lighthouse was listed as \$3,947. It was commonly known as LaPlaisance Bay Lighthouse. The structure consisted of a round masonry-style tower that was whitewashed. It stood 40 feet tall, the internal framing was wood construction, and the focal plane of the beacon was listed as 42 feet above the mean level of the lake.

The lens was listed as 11 patent oil lamps with a 14-inch silver reflector. On July 4, 1829, the light was illuminated for the first time. The records stated its flashing sequence as fixed white. The lantern room was surrounded by a black iron railing system that was similar to one at Barcelona Lighthouse in Barcelona, New York.

A 1½ story keeper's quarters was constructed from rough split stone and mortar. The keeper's dwelling dimensions were listed as 34 feet long by 20 feet wide with ceilings 8 feet high on both floors. The dwelling was made up of four rooms, two upstairs, two rooms downstairs, and a wood burning fireplace that was centered in the middle of the first floor. The staircase that was built near the center of the first floor was used to access the rooms on the second floor.

Author's Note: Andrew Mack, superintendent stationed in Detroit, Michigan, was responsible for constructing the lighthouse and keeper's quarters at Otter Creek.

Keeper John A. Whipple

John A. Whipple was born in Massachusetts in 1776. Whipple made his way to the Northwest Territory just after 1796. His wife, Archange (Pelletier) Whipple, accompanied him from the east coast to Monroe. The couple tied the knot about four years later in Detroit, Michigan.

From 1800 until his appointment as keeper-in-charge, Whipple served in the U.S. Army. According to his military records, he was stationed in Detroit, Michigan. In 1809 he was appointed to the position of associate judge of the territory. During the War of 1812, his rank was listed as captain. In 1818 and continuing through 1825, Whipple was the sole proprietor of the Manson House. Over the next four years, he was responsible for registering deeds in and around Monroe.

In 1829 the Light-House Establishment appointed Major Whipple as the first "keeper-in-charge" of the Otter Creek Lighthouse (LaPlaisance Bay Lighthouse).

Author's Note: Stated in one of the newspaper articles published in 1876 was that Major John Whipple from Detroit, Michigan, was appointed keeper-in-charge of a lighthouse that was recently constructed near the LaPlaisance Bay Harbor along the shores of Lake Erie.

It was a well-known fact that during the winter months that Lake Erie and River Raisin would usually freeze over. Charles Lanman, editor of the *Monroe Gazette*, and a few of his closest friends would occasionally skate their way from the bridge at Macomb Street and along the River Raisin towards Otter Creek Lighthouse. Lanman and his fellow skaters would always end up at Whipple's quarters. Those well-known individuals would sit in the parlor and eat a rustic dinner prepared by Whipple and his lovely wife. Once dinner was finished, Whipple would entertain his guests. On November 4, 1836, Whipple passed away in Monroe.

Otter Creek Lighthouse (Days are Numbered)

Lighthouse officials knew that with the completion of the new canal that the Otter Creek Lighthouse was not really



Otter Creek Lighthouse, circa 1841. National Archives photo.

needed anymore. From what I have been able to gather, the old lighthouse would eventually be decommissioned because the entrance point to the new harbor was now some four miles away from its original origin.

On August 12, 1848, Congress approved a petition for \$3,522 to construct a new lighthouse along Monroe Harbor. The new Monroe Harbor Lighthouse was operational prior to the start of the 1849 navigation season. During that same time frame, Otter Creek Lighthouse was decommissioned. In 1854 the old and now abandoned lighthouse was sold. Unfortunately, the buyer was not listed on any of the documents I looked through.

Some years later in the 1870s, United States Revenue Collector Strong sold John Jacob Luft what was left of the Otter Creek Lighthouse. He paid the whopping sum of \$10. A few days later he began to dismantle the old lighthouse structure. Luft loaded the rubble stones on his wagon. Once the wagon was full, he and his team of horses moved the entire load to his Michigan property. Luft then constructed a very sturdy foundation out of rough stones he acquired from the sale of the lighthouse. Sometime during that same year, Luft used the remainder of rubble stones from the lighthouse to construct several other structures on his property.

Author's Note: In my opinion, the loss of Otter Creek Lighthouse was definitely caused by the government's lack of forethought and the

construction of what some called "The Government Canal" or "The Manmade Harbor."

Monroe Harbor Lighthouse

Monroe Harbor Lighthouse (Monroe Pier Lighthouse) once stood on one of two timber piers with wooden pilings that ran about a fifth of a mile into Lake Erie on each

side of the new government canal. It was decided to use this type of timber construction near Monroe, Michigan, for a couple of reasons. The first one was to keep the sand from moving when the tides shifted. The other reason was that the government canal wouldn't be closed off when the winds came out of the west. The new lighthouse tower was constructed out of wood, was an octagonal shape, and was situated at the very end of the north pier.

Monroe Harbor Lighthouse once housed a fourth-order dioptric, 180-degree Fresnel lens manufactured in Paris, France, by the Louis Sautter company. The large glass lens was situated in the center of the iron lantern room. The beacon was illuminated by a single-valve ruby chimney in the center of the Fresnel lens. The arc of the lens was listed as west-north-west by south to north-north-east and was characterized as a fixed red light. The brightly burning flame that illuminated the beacon was fueled by whale



Monroe Pier Lighthouse on the left. National Archives photo.