

## False Duck Island Lighthouse

*Researched and written by Larry and Pat Wright*



Legislation passed on March 25, 1828 granted £1,000 to construct a "good and sufficient lighthouse on False Duck Island" in Prince Edward County, Ontario. It was hoped that the light would "tend greatly to the safety and convenience of navigation on Lake Ontario." This lighthouse, built on the island's east point, was one of the earliest built in Canada.

The tower and keeper's house were built of limestone. The tower's total height was 73 feet (22.3 m) and its British-manufactured lantern was 8 feet (2.4 m) in diameter and showed a fixed white light with a visibility of 13 miles (21 km) in fair weather. In 1878 the lighthouse had 15 No.1 base-burner lamps and 15 reflectors mounted about 5 feet (1.5 m) off the floor.

By 1898 the lighting apparatus consisted of three, double-wick,



*The fog signal building and tower at False Duck Island light station ca. 1960*

duplex burners fitted to a brass fountain enclosed in a Parisian lens of the third order. Once this light was "properly set going," it did not require constant attention through the night. This is probably why the keeper preferred it to the new apparatus he had been sent, which consisted of a pressure, circular

burner lamp that required "constant attention throughout the entire night." During the day the lens was hung with a canvas cover, and curtains were drawn across the windows to prevent sun damage. In 1904 a fog building was added to the complex.



*An undated photograph showing False Duck Island light station from the air.*

On November 26, 1905 lightning struck both the tower and the dwelling. It hit 3 feet (1 m) below the gallery, broke a large hole in the masonry and tore up four steps at the top of the circular staircase. From there it ran down the wall making two more holes and slightly cracking the wall on the outside from the first hole halfway down the tower. It blew off the main entrance door and traveled underground to the fog signal plant, where little damage was done. Two glass panels in the lantern, all the small window panes in the tower, and the glass chimney for the lighting apparatus were broken by the shock. Fortunately, the lens was not damaged. However, the keeper's house was struck on the side closest



*Painting the tower at False Duck Island at some the in the early 1960's*

to the attached storehouse where five barrels of oil, 7 tons of coal, and the keeper's winter supplies were stored. The oil immediately caught fire and ignited the whole house. Nothing was saved except the keeper and his family. Only the stone walls remained standing.

The keeper moved into the fog building for the winter so that he could tend the light through the end of the season. He also stayed on at the island, with emergency provisions, to feed the livestock, but his family moved to the mainland for the winter. Until this disaster the keeper and his family had always wintered on the island but they never did again. The

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next May, tower repairs, costing \$400, were finished. The remains of the stone keeper's house were torn down and a new clapboard house was built. A separate oil shed was also built to prevent any such risk in the future. The new building cost about \$2000. The keeper was given \$100 by the government to cover the loss of his personal possessions.

With its long years of service and political appointments, the lighthouse had many keepers, but not all of them have been recorded. A few of them led colorful lives and archival documents relate many disputes over issues such as the keeper's honesty, bribery to obtain and keep the position, political partisanship, neglect of government property, and leaving the light and fog station unattended. In December, 1902, the steamer John Hall, was lost in a severe storm close to the False Duck Island Lighthouse when this light was not burning.

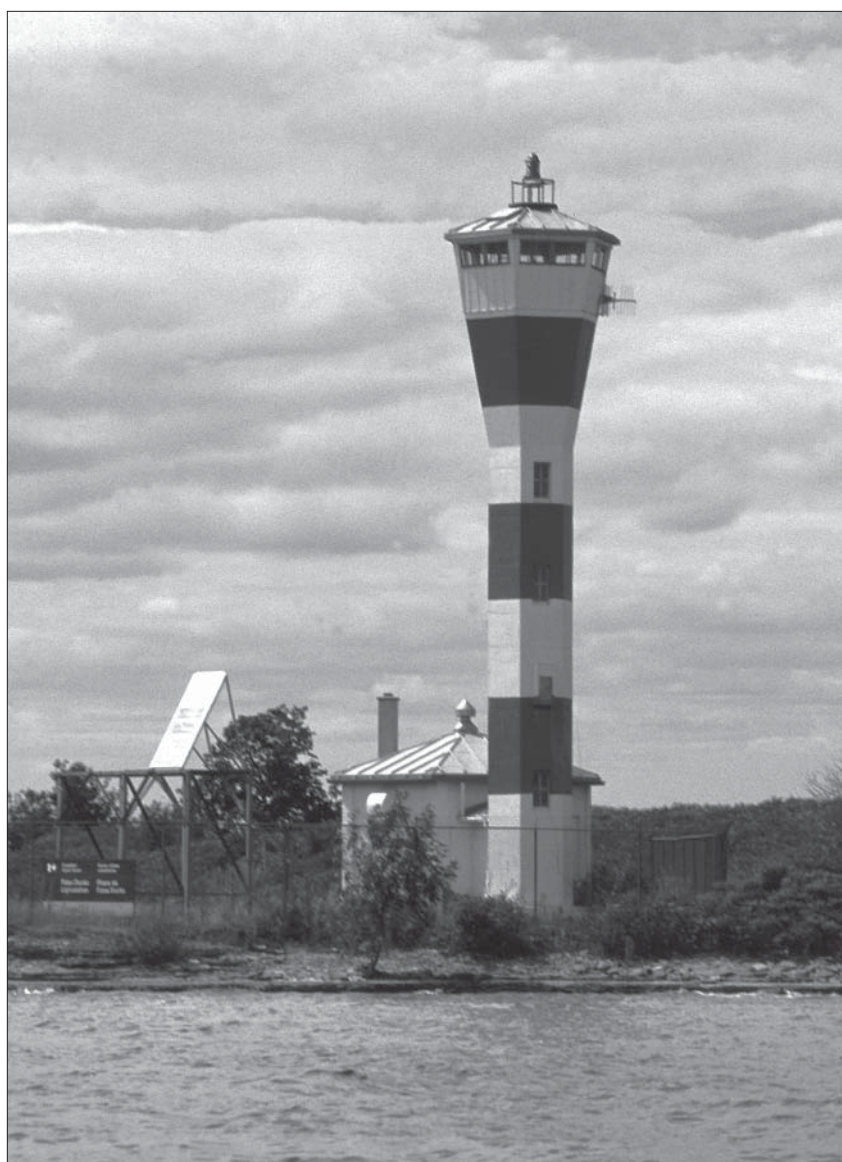
Changes occurred with the times. In 1947 a radio phone was installed at the station. A new fog building was constructed and ready for use in October, 1952. The old fog building was remodeled to use as a keeper's residence. The light was switched from a vapor light to electricity. Then in



*Both towers still standing before the old tower was demolished in June 1966*

*From the Larry Wright Collection*

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of South Bay and is open from Victoria Day to Thanksgiving.

Although time, people, and structures have changed at this station, the light still sends out its warning signal today to help mark safe passage for boaters in the area of Prince Edward County on the northeast shore of Lake Ontario.

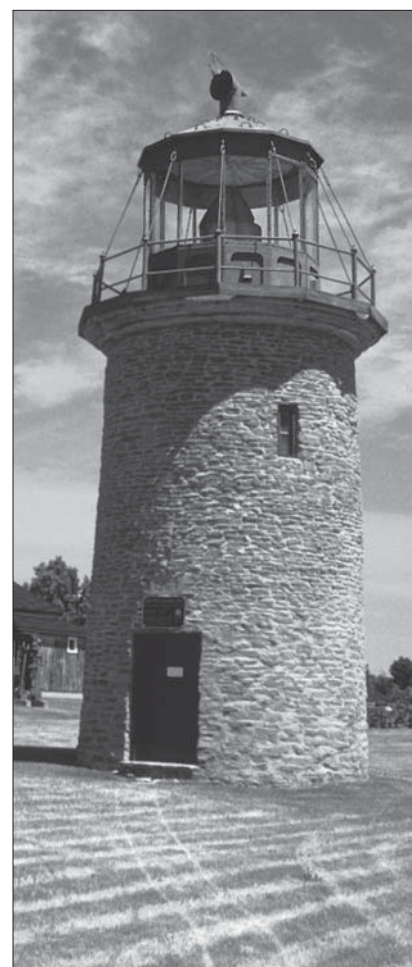
Known Keepers: F. Swetman (1863–86), W.H. Lane (1886–91), P.N. Farrington (1891–94), J. M. Hudgins (1894–1903), D. Dulmage (1903–12), J.W. Hudgins (1912–18), G. E. Hudgins (1918–23), K.A. Duette (1923–23), J. Hutchinson (1924–27), E. Bongard (1927–28), K.A. McConnell (1928–57), J. McConnell (1957–65).

***False Duck Island lighthouse as it appears today.***

1965 James McConnell extinguished the light for the last time. On Friday, June 3, 1966 the old stone tower, which had been weakened at its base by government workers, was pulled to the ground by the Canadian Coast Guard tender *Simcoe*.

The light was replaced by a hexagonal, 60-foot (18.3-m) reinforced concrete tower, painted with 8-foot (2.4-m) red and white horizontal bands. A fog building was attached. The tower's lantern housed an automated, red-colored, flashing, electric beacon that was first lit on November 3,

1966. The old iron lantern and light were removed from the limestone tower and presented to the Prince Edward Historical Society, which had opened a marine museum in 1966. As a centennial project, the South Marysburgh council had a new, but much shorter (only 30 feet/9.2m), limestone tower built at the museum to support the lantern they were given from the old False Duck Island Lighthouse. On September 17, 1967 this lighthouse was dedicated as a memorial to the sailors of the county who lost their lives under steam and sail. The museum is located at the head



***The lens and lantern from False Duck light atop the 30 foot limestone tower at the Mariners Memorial Park & Museum on Quinte Island.***

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