



The History of the Barge Canal Lighthouses of Oneida Lake

by BILL ORZELL

THE NEW YORK STATE BARGE CANAL SYSTEM, that amazing and complex network of man made structures and natural waterways, includes in its inventory three very unique lighthouses.

The Barge Canal engineers designed the present day system to be used by motorized vessels, breaking with the traditional draft animal towage of the original and enlarged 19th-century canals. This allowed the Barge Canal to take full advantage of New York State's abundance of large lakes and rivers. As such, the route of the Barge Canal traverses Oneida Lake, the largest body of water located entirely within the boundaries of New York State.

Oneida Lake's twenty two miles of open, shallow water are notorious for blowing up into a ferocious boil of wind and waves. To provide 24 hour passage on the potentially hazardous lake to mariners of burdened vessels, the state constructed three rather large lighthouses during the original construction.

One of the lighthouses stands in Verona Beach, on the eastern end of Oneida Lake. This lighthouse is across the canal from Sylvan Beach and its popular amusement park and canal pier. A second light house is on Frenchman's Island, near the western end of Oneida Lake. The location of this large and historic island is an excellent point on which to fix one's position when navigating the big lake. The third lighthouse is located on the extreme western end of Oneida

Lake. Its strategic location across the lake's outlet from Brewerton allows its beacon, in combination with another light on the Route 11 bridge, to provide an illuminated range.

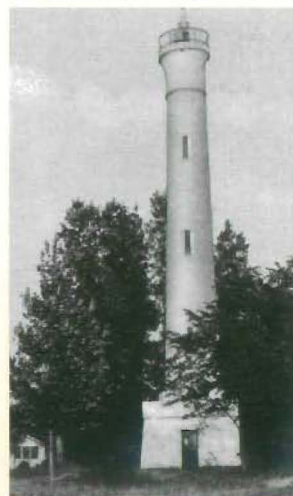
These three lighthouses, while unique to the Barge Canal System, are identical in design to one another. They were constructed of reinforced concrete using the same forms at each of the three locations.

From a large square base, which provides a foundation as well as an entry area and fuel storage space, the tower rises some eighty feet. The round tower tapers gracefully to support the large lantern and maintenance platform at the pinnacle. This upper platform is ringed by a wrought iron latticed railing.

The lantern platform is reached by climbing five separate stairways contained within the tower. These stairways are illuminated by slender rectangular windows. The lower windows unfortunately have been used by vandals to gain access to the lighthouses. These acts necessitated the canal maintenance department over the years to block off the openings with large steel plates.

Despite these periodic assaults, the Barge Canal lighthouses have been remarkably durable. They have stood since 1915, when they were built by the Lufer & Remick Company of Buffalo under Barge Canal contract #132. They have been in constant service ever since, and have nobly withstood Oneida Lake's fickle temperament. Some other additional modifications have been made over the years at each lighthouse site, such as a steel frame tower added to the platform of the Frenchman's Island location to lift the beacon above the surrounding trees. The Brewerton location was originally equipped with a red light as it is on the north bank of the canal which is marked by navigational aids painted red (mariners remind themselves that "red is right returning from the sea"). This was modified to white light to complete a lighted range, or superimposed lights that show mariners the proper course for their vessels. In 1927 the Brewerton and Verona Beach sites were modified from self contained gas cylinder fuel systems to use purchased commercial electric to illuminate the beacons.

To the casual observer, the Barge Canal lighthouses resemble rather large candlesticks, a notion not inconsistent with their purpose.



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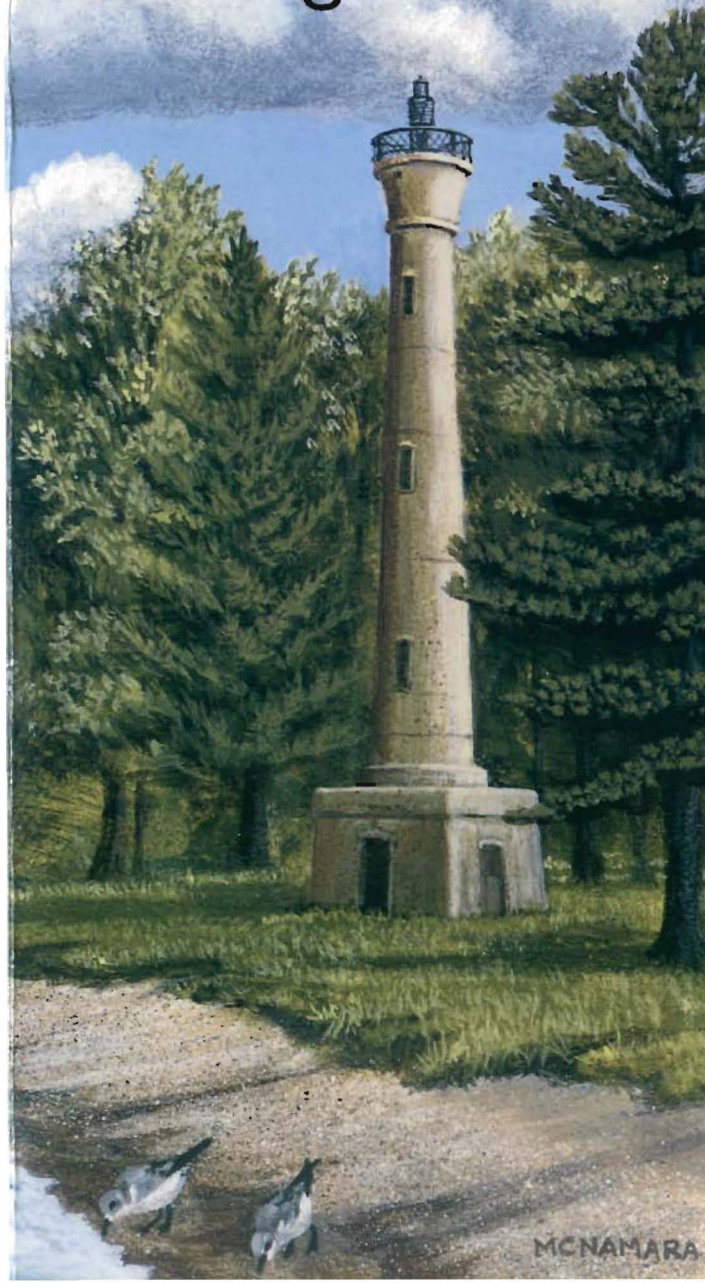


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The Lighthouse



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Preserving Our Heritage

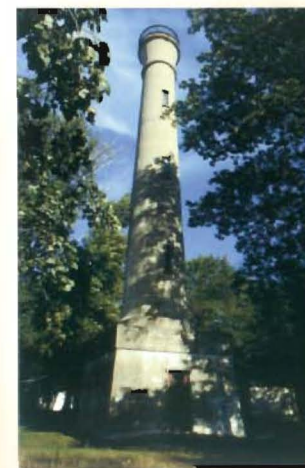
SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL and breathtaking historic landmarks in the United States are its Lighthouses. For hundreds of years they have stood proud and firm along our waters' shores, through treacherous storms, howling winds, and the beating sun. They have served as guardians to many a weary sailor who has sought their beacons in search of a safe harbor.

Unfortunately, too many of these American treasures are being neglected and have fallen into disrepair. It is for this reason that area residents and neighbors of Verona Beach along with the Town of Verona have come together and formed The Verona Beach Lighthouse Association. Their Mission is to protect and preserve the Verona Beach Lighthouse for this and all future generations.

Through persistence and hard work, neighbors plan to restore the Lighthouse and its surrounding area to original condition. They are pursuing grants, donations, and volunteers to clean-up and create a quiet refuge for those who wish to bask in the beauty of Oneida Lake. Also, as a "working" Lighthouse, water craft will be able to clearly see the Lighthouse Beacon knowing they are nearing the entrance to the Barge Canal and the Verona and Sylvan Beaches.

It is important that communities come together to preserve our historic landmarks, however, small. It is our gift to our

children and future generations. Let our example teach them how important it is to maintain and respect these beautiful assets. Our history is the gateway to our future. Preserving our historic landmarks allows us to step back in time and reflect on our American heritage.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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