

Great Lakes Lighthouses Encyclopedia By Larry Wright and Patricia Wright

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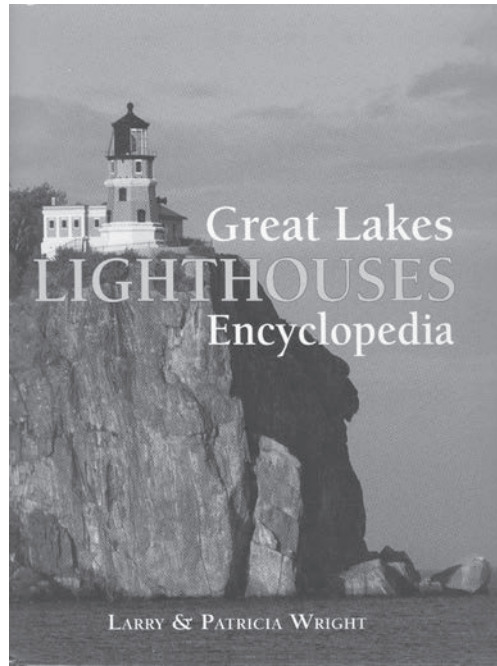
Great Lakes Lighthouses Encyclopedia

By Larry Wright and Patricia Wright. Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2006. 448 pp. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN 1-55046-399-3.

As any reader will know, lighthouses have been an aid to navigation since ancient times. The lighthouse at Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the world, provided a guiding light to shipping from about 300 BCE to 1323 CE when an earthquake destroyed it. Its mirror was so perfectly made that the light could be seen from a distance of 50 km offshore. When the Great Lakes were opened to European exploration and settlement, lighthouses soon followed. The Great Lakes maritime industry – shipping, fishing, and pleasure craft – could not have evolved without the network of lighthouses ringing the 17,000 km of shoreline. Before the advent of radar, GPS satellite positioning, and other modern tools to assist ships, lighthouses provided the only beacon to a safe harbour.

Those of us who were born near the Great Lakes or who live there now (as I do in Oakville) often forget that we are next to 20 per cent of the world's surface freshwater. I am constantly reminded of this fact as I teach my university environmental studies students about world freshwater resources. Many of them were not born in Canada and have little knowledge of the amazing resource on their doorstep. I try to impress upon them the ecological, economic, social, and cultural importance of the Great Lakes in the development of the Great Lakes region.

More than thirty years of concerted effort by Canada and the United States have resulted in significant improvements in the environmental conditions in the Great Lakes. Hundreds of scientific papers have



been written about pollution, habitat loss etc., and the improvements made, but it is only recently, with the appearance of invasive species, and with concern about declining water levels due to climate change, that the commercial shipping industry has been engaged in the environmental debate. Navigational aids are going to become even more important in the future as water levels in the Great Lakes are projected to drop by up to one meter. What role will the necklace of lighthouses around the Great Lakes have in the future? My guess is that they will continue to play a critical role, as sailors of all kinds look at their electronic gadgetry for direction, but then scan the horizon, as sailors have done for millennia, for that familiar light that will lead them to safety.

Patricia Wright (writer) and Larry Wright (photographer) have been collecting facts and figures on Great Lakes light-

houses for over 25 years, and have produced two previous books: *Bonfires and Beacons* and *Bright Lights, Dark Nights*. *Encyclopedia* is a full-colour, coffee-table book that presents an exhaustive compendium of the lighthouses on all five Great Lakes. The introduction gives a good overview of the size of the Great Lakes system, the unpredictability of the weather, and the long irregular coastline with its shallow waters and hidden reefs and shoals. Lake Erie, for example can turn into a raging cauldron by sustained wind from the west. The Introduction continues by giving a brief history of European settlement on both sides of the border, and of the nascent shipping industry developing in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The importance and development of lighthouses is thorough, and an enjoyable read. One picks up little tidbits such as “blackbirding,” which is the creation of false shore signals to create deliberate shipwrecks that could then be looted. (p 14)

Encyclopedia is arranged by lake and country, so if a reader is searching for a particular lighthouse, its entry is relatively easy to find. There is a good description of the many types of lighthouse designs – round or hexagonal, of wood or stone – and this approach is helpful as one browses through the book. *Encyclopedia* is full of superb pictures and well-written accounts of each

lighthouse, and the amount of research that has gone into producing it is impressive. One example will suffice to illustrate: the Queen’s Wharf lighthouse from Toronto harbour (pp. 74-75). This lighthouse now stands well inland, having been moved, according to the Wrights, to its present site in 1929. As a boy growing up in Toronto, I was always fascinated by this oddity (then painted green, now painted in its approximate original colour of brown or rust) standing at the junction of Fleet Street and Lakeshore Boulevard. Was this the original shoreline, I wondered. Was the lighthouse moved here? If so, how was it moved? Well, my questions are all answered in the book, but you will have to see for yourselves. For anyone interested in Great Lakes’ history, especially maritime history, *Great Lakes Lighthouses Encyclopedia* is a must.

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