



LIGHTS ON THE GREAT LAKES

The Great Lakes, which are also known as the "inland seas" or the "third coast of the U.S. and Canada," consist of the five Great Lakes: Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, and Superior. Together, they cover an area of 94,250 square miles (244,100 square kilometers) and contain one-fifth of the world's fresh water. They are so huge that they can be seen from the Moon. Two of them derive their names from the Indian tribes that once inhabited the area: the Eries and the Hurons. Before being given its current name, Lake Michigan was called "Lake of the Stinking Water," "Lake of the Puants," and "Lac des Illinois." Ontario in Iroquois means "beautiful lake." "Le lac Superieus," the name given to Lake Superior by French explorers, means "Upper Lake," and, indeed, its elevation is higher than the others. It is also the biggest and deepest of them

all. Rivers and channels connect the lakes: the St. Mary's River connects Lake Superior to Lake Huron; the St. Clair River, St. Clair Lake, and the Detroit River connect Lake Huron to Lake Erie; the Niagara River (with Niagara Falls) connects Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. The border between the U.S. and Canada runs down the middle of Lake Erie. The Great Lakes greatly affect the weather, climate, and the way of life of the inhabitants of the 10 states and provinces that they touch. The states and provinces include: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Quebec, and Wisconsin. In this issue of *Zoom in on America* we will take a closer look at some of the lighthouses that have guarded the 10,500 miles (16,900 km) of coast that make up the Great Lakes.



Ice covers the South Haven lighthouse and gantry along the Lake Michigan shore in South Haven, Michigan, Photo © AP Images

VICTIMS OF THE GREAT LAKES



The largest and longest vessel ever built on the Great Lakes, the 729-foot ore carrier SS Edmund Fitzgerald, slides into the launching basin, on June 7, 1958, in Detroit, Michigan. Photo ©AP Images

The Great Lakes have never been easy to navigate. The fall months, October through December, have frequent storms, with the waves reaching a height of ten meters at times. There was such a severe storm on Lake Superior on November 10, 1975 that the largest ship to have ever sailed the Great Lakes at the time, the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, sank within seconds.

The ship, captained by Ernest M. McSorley, began its fateful journey from Superior Wisconsin with a cargo of 26,000 tons of taconite. It was scheduled to land on Zug Island on the Detroit River; however, an unexpectedly strong blizzard made the captain change his course northward towards the more secure waters of Whitefish Bay. There was also a lighthouse in that bay; unfortunately, though, its light was not working that day due to the severity of the storm. Tragically, with only about 15 miles separating her from the Bay, the *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank without ever even sending an SOS (distress signal). The crew of 29 sailors all perished.

The *Edmund Fitzgerald* is just one of thousands of ships that have wrecked on the Great Lakes. Another tragic disaster happened near the Grosse Point Light in Evanston, Illinois when the steamer ship known as the *Eastland* capsized while pulling away from its dock because someone had forgotten to release the ropes on her stern. The accident resulted in the deaths of 835 of the ship's 2,500 passengers.

Violent storms are known for collecting deadly tolls, and storms on the Great Lakes are no exception. In 1905 alone three such storms killed 116 people on Lake Superior, while one record gale in November of that same year wrecked 30 ships.

Another difficult year was 1897 when a freighter, the *Idaho*, carrying a cargo of Christmas confections sank near Dunkirk Light on Lake Erie. For weeks after the shipwreck, slabs of chocolate washed up on the lake's shores.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Research Foundation researches shipwrecks and explores the still relatively unexplored lakebeds in search of schooners, steamers, and other sunken ships embedded in the depths of the Great Lakes. When explorers come across these sunken ships they usually leave them as they find them. In the case of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, however, the bell of the unfortunate ship was lifted out of the water and placed in the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Whitefish Point, Michigan. A copy of the bell was cast and taken down to the wreck to replace the original.

The memory of those who have perished on the lakes lives on. For example, each year on November 10 lamps are lit at the Split Rock Lighthouse in commemoration of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* tragedy 33 years ago.



IN GOOD AND BAD WEATHER



*The South Haven, Michigan,
Photo © AP Images*



*The lighthouse in Menominee,
Michigan, Photo © AP Images*



*Manistee, Michigan, north pier
light, Photo © AP Images*



*Pier and lighthouse in South Haven,
Michigan, Photo © AP Images*

The dictionary describes a lighthouse as a tower or other structure containing a beacon of light to warn or guide ships at sea. What sight is more reassuring for seamen than a streak of light amidst the night waters of unknown seas? What sound is more welcome than the distant echo of a fog horn in a dense mist? Indeed, lighthouses have always been sailors' best friends.

Lighthouses first produced their light by the use of fires and candles. Later, they began to use kerosene lamps, and today electricity powers their lights. These changes have greatly affected the work of the lighthouse keeper. In the past, in spite of the risks, the hardships, and the low pay, the profession had a romantic appeal as well as prestige. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case.

In the old days, a special bond existed between sailors and lighthouse keepers; keepers were always aware of the responsibility they held for the lives of sailors. The keepers, both men and women, were also in a sense lifeguards who rescued castaways and others from drowning. Many lighthouse keepers saved dozens and even hundreds of lives.

The job of lighthouse keeping often passed from father to son or from husband to wife. It provided a home for the keepers, although it became harder and harder for lighthouse inhabitants to maintain their privacy as lighthouses became very popular as tourist destinations in the early 20th century.

The 20th century, with the development in technology and the two World Wars changed the job of the light-

house keeper tremendously. Technology produced less of a need for lighthouse keepers, and in 1999 the last manned light station (Boston Harbor Light) was automated.

With the lighthouse keepers moving out (many old-style keepers moved out as a result of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Reorganization Plan No.11, which transferred the service from civilian hands to the U.S. Coast Guard), their houses and lighthouse towers started to crumble. Neglected, exposed to high winds, waves, and humidity, they soon lost their luster, and years later plans were made to take them down.

But by that time, local people did not want to let them go. They wanted them restored and brought back to their former beauty. Groups of preservationists conducted crusades to save the old lighthouses. Such efforts restored the Charlotte-Genesee Light in Rochester, New York, the Crisp Point Light in Northwest of Paradise, Michigan, the Fire Island Light in New York, and the Holland Harbor Light in Holland, Michigan. The lenses from the deactivated lighthouses were often entrusted to maritime museums.

The good purpose lighthouses serve by assisting ships in bad weather, guiding them safely to ports, and warning them against shallow waters and treacherous rocks has warmed people's hearts to them for centuries. The image of a lighthouse against tranquil waters is as much spectacular as it is inspirational.



*The Ponce Inlet Lighthouse
Photo © AP Images*



*The Ludington Lighthouse
Photo © AP Images*



*The Ludington Lighthouse
Photo © AP Images*



*The North Manistee Lighthouse
Photo © AP Images*

Click to listen:



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ACTIVITY PAGE

Win a Prize!

January 2009 CONTEST

Give at least two nouns that contain the word "house", e.g. "lighthouse"

Send the answer (with your home address) to: madridIRC@state.gov

Deadline:
February 15, 2009

Win a Prize!

The answer in the December 2008 Contest:

29 years

Thank you for participating

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08034 Barcelona

Zoom in on the USA

thanks all of you who sent us warm New Year's greetings.

We extend best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year to all of our dear readers. And - as suits the topic of this issue - may the light from all the lighthouses around the world show you the best and safest paths.



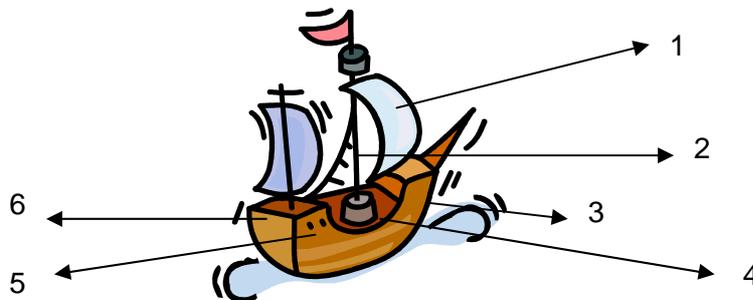
Exercise 1:

Comprehension: true (T) or false (F)

1. Lake St. Clair is counted as one of the five Great Lakes.
2. Being a lighthouse keeper was a job only for men.
3. Local residents took pride in the old lighthouses and wanted to restore them.
4. The Edmund Fitzgerald was lifted from the bed of Lake Superior.

Exercise 2

Please name the parts of the SHIP indicated by the arrows:



Glossary

(in the order of appearance)

derive - arise from or originate

ply - (about a vessel) travel regularly over a route

list - (of a ship) lean to one side, typically because of a leak or unbalanced cargo

stern - the rearmost part of a ship

confection - a delicacy made with sweet ingredients

streak - a long line or mark of a different color from its surroundings

luster - having a shine or glow