

Buffalo's emergence as a bustling port of entry continued after the 1825 opening of the Erie Canal. The city quickly outgrew its first lighthouse erected in 1820, and the 1833 stone tower still standing today was superseded by the north breakwater station in the 1870's. Still, the volume of ship traffic necessitated another expansion of the harbor, and by 1900 plans were underway "to mark the main southern entrance of the new breakwater at Buffalo, N.Y." An appropriation of \$45,000 was made to cover the construction of two light towers and a fog signal building, as well as the foundations and groups of piles needed to guard the projects from rough seas. Blueprints for the separate keeper's quarters were also begun in 1900. Lighthouse Board reports indicate that the preliminary plans were completed the following year, but a pair of gales badly damaged the breakwater near the construction site, so it was decided to make the buildings stronger. It was ultimately determined to place both a fog signal and beacon light on the channel's southern entrance, and an accompanying, smaller light on the northern side.

A contract for the piles to protect the channel was signed, with a target completion date of December 31, 1902. With the concrete foundations for the buildings already laid, efforts turned to finding a site for a "double dwelling" keeper's quarters on the mainland. Owing to difficulties in acquiring the heavy iron for the structure of the beacon and fog signal house, however, the contractors were unable to finish their work by the end of 1902. Instead, the lighthouse was sealed up and securely anchored for the long winter

ahead. Work was taken up again in the spring as soon as the ice permitted, but some defective building materials and shoddy craftsmanship further impeded the project's completion until later in 1903. At that time, Board reports noted that the south side lighthouse and the "steel beacon on the north side" were both essentially finished, and that the metal trusses for the roof of the fog signal building had been delivered to Buffalo. Work on the fog house was also delayed by material concerns, however, as the timbers intended for the walls of the building did not pass muster. Other areas of the project proved more encouraging, as a title to real estate for the keeper's quarters was obtained. Important parts for the lighthouses were in various states of transit; the pedestal, clockwork and lens for the south tower were being stored at the general light house depot, awaiting shipment. The north beacon's lens lantern had already been delivered to the light house lamp shop in the city, and the fog signal's engines, siren and air receivers were in readiness at the Buffalo depot.

Both the north and south side lighthouses were exhibited for the first time on September 15, 1903. The following year the keeper's house was completed, and on May 10 construction of the fog signal building was finally begun. The four walls of the house were erected, and the ironwork was put in place awaiting installation of the roof trusses. On November 12, 1904, a fog siren powered by twin 13 horsepower engines and compressed air was in readiness. Also around this time a 176 foot "timber bulkhead...on the easterly side

of the Stony Point arm of the breakwater was completed."

The new beacons were especially important to turn of the century Buffalo, as the city became the largest lumber port and grain milling center in the world. Near the lighthouse grounds was the new Lackawanna Steel plant, a Bethlehem Steel Company venture that contributed significantly to the traffic around the south harbor entrance.

The southside structure is a round, white tower composed of steel, with a black base and a white lantern graced with glass panes in a diamond configuration. The interior is furnished with fine wood paneling. Originally containing a fourth order Fresnel lens, the lantern later sported a 300 mm optic. With a height of 53 feet above the harbor's low tide, the light's characteristic was a complex pattern of alternating red and white flashes. The original fog siren was replaced by an air diaphone, which produced a two tone air blast every three seconds, with a silent period of 27 seconds. The fog signal house adjoining the tower was painted brown.

Automated in 1935, the South breakwater light is currently inactive. It is difficult to arrange a visit to the tower, as it is surrounded by industrial properties. The beacon's fourth order Fresnel lens is now in Buffalo's cherished and more centrally located 1833 tower, and is used to decoratively light up that monument at night. The south harbor's northside 'bottle' light was decommissioned in 1988, and transferred to a maritime museum on the site of the Dunkirk Lighthouse on Lake Erie. This bottle light has a

twin that originally marked the channel opposite the North breakwater light; currently the second bottle light sits in the 1,400 foot river promenade surrounding Buffalo's historic tower. The off-limits South Buffalo light is visible from this promenade, which provides a nice complement to the historical plaques and exhibits that pepper the park land.

The replacement for the south side lighthouse is a simple, modern post light that is very convenient to maintain. For the harbor as a whole, the successor to the South breakwater and other Buffalo beacons is a modern, 71 foot steel tower that sits at the edge of the harbor's most distant breakwater. Brandishing an aerobeacon light that alternates between green and white flashes, this station never required keepers and is instead powered by underwater cables and maintained by occasional visits from Coast Guard vessels.

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