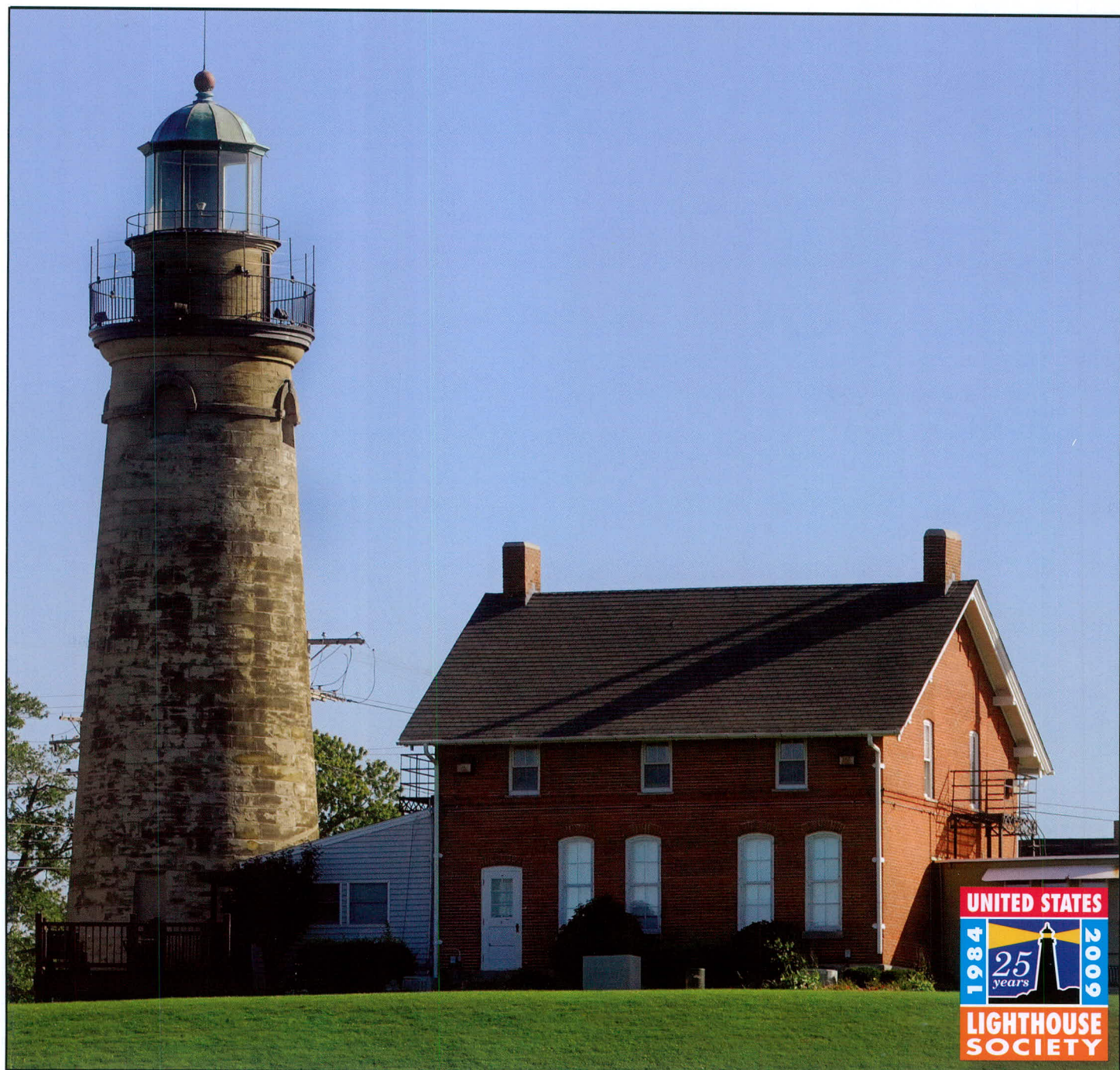


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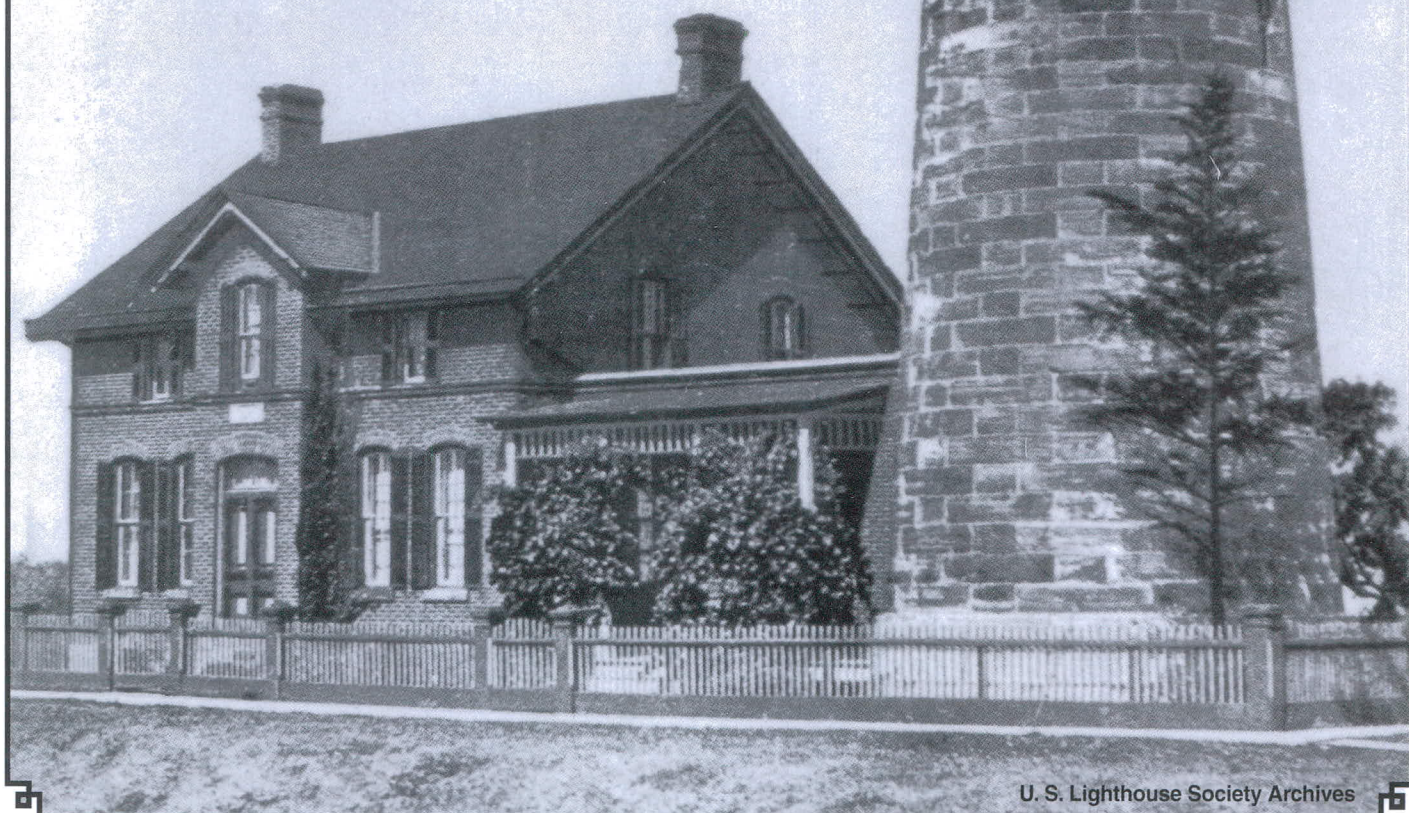
- Fairport Harbor Lighthouse, Ohio
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FAIRPORT HARBOR LIGHTHOUSE

The Freedom Light

By Elinor DeWire



U. S. Lighthouse Society Archives

Lighthouses are responsible for saving lives and property, but this is the story of a lighthouse that went beyond the obligatory rescue of ships and crews, passengers and cargo. For nearly four decades, it was a beacon of hope for a despised, abused, and desperate faction of society. Fairport Harbor Light was a critical stop on the Underground Railroad that brought black slaves to freedom in Canada. And many years later, when its light was no longer needed, the lighthouse itself was saved by a group of insightful citizens who recognized its unique contributions to the American story.

The history of Fairport Harbor Lighthouse reads like a good novel, with all the drama, colorful characters, and mixture of emotions we'd expect in a best-selling book. It has a happy ending too, and today we can safely say it's living "happily ever after." But to appreciate the way things turned out, we must journey back to the early 1800s, when Ohio had just gained statehood and throngs of hopeful pioneers, dogged by confident speculators and opportunists, were pouring into the new state. The converging masses needed a guiding light to see them safely into their futures. Fairport Harbor Lighthouse—stalwart, dependable, and resilient—was a model of Midwest mettle.

It all began when a sheltered lake-harbor feeding into a pliable river in northeast Ohio was dubbed the Gateway to the Western Reserve. The fertile tract of Lake Erie shore-front, some 120-miles long, was purchased by the Connecticut Land Company in hopes that droves of homesteaders from crowded eastern states would use it as a staging point for westward migration. No decent wagon roads had been cut across the wilderness of western New York and Pennsylvania in the early 1800s, so getting to Ohio was a challenge. A few of the more intrepid pioneers came in the winter months on heavy, ox-drawn sleighs, with the



The original brick lighthouse and saltbox dwelling, built in 1825 by New England native Jonathan Goldsmith, looked sturdy enough, but within a decade problems arose with the foundation. Eventually, the station was completely rebuilt. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.

wind howling up their sleeves and the surface of Lake Erie like frosted glass. Most settlers came by water, however, traveling the rivers and making portage where necessary to reach the lake. From there, they boarded ships bound for the Western Reserve.

They were attracted to the land for the same reasons the great Iroquois tribes had migrated there centuries before: O-he-yo was rich and arable, and there was bountiful fish and game. It was "the place of the beautiful river," a wide-open frontier waiting to be mastered. By the time settlers began putting down roots, most of the Iroquois had moved further north and west, but their liquid language still echoed in the names of many twisting rivers feeding and siphoning Lake Erie—Cuyahoga, Chippewa, Mohican, Huron, Tuscarawas, and even the "beautiful river" itself, the Ohio.

It was the French who named the river and the harbor over which Fairport Lighthouse would someday shine. Trappers had found a profitable trade here with the Indians and called the handsome estuary "La Grande Riviere." The Connecticut Land Company must have thought it a suitable name too, for they translated it into the English "Grand River" and dubbed the tiny settlement "Grandon." About 1818 a traveler named William Darby passed through Grandon and left a simple description of the river in his journal: "Grand River is a stream of some consequence...about 70-yards wide at the mouth, with a 7-foot water on the bar near the entrance to the lake. The east bank rises to a height of 30 or 40 feet according a very handsome sight of a village. The harbor is excellent for such vessels whose whole draft of water will admit entrance. Prep-





A two-masted schooner framed Fairport Harbor Lighthouse in an 1858 photo taken from the west side of the river entrance. The tower and house wore a white daymark at this time. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.

arations are making to form wharves...to afford a harbor to vessels of any draft."

Steamboat traffic into the Grand River increased considerably in the early years after settlement. By 1825, when the population of Grandon had grown to about 300 and steamboat navigation was in full swing on Lake Erie, the harbor's future looked bright indeed. Citizens abandoned the name Grandon and proudly announced their town's new name would be "Fairport," a moniker sure to attract hardworking folks from back east. Soon, there was so much activity in the harbor it seemed sensible to build a lighthouse on the bluff overlooking the estuary. The March 26, 1825 issue of the *Painesville Telegraph* carried a notice asking for bids on the proposed lighthouse and keeper's quarters:

"The Light-House to be built of stone or hard brick, the form round. The foundation to be sunk three feet; or as deep as may be necessary to make fabric secure; to be laid in good lime mortar. The heighth [sic] of the tower to be thirty feet from the surface of the ground. The diameter of the base to be eighteen feet; and that of the top nine feet. The thickness of the walls at the base to be three feet, and to be uniformly graduated to twenty inches at the top. The top to be arched, on which is to be laid a deck of soapstone, eleven feet in diameter, four inches thick, the joints to be filled in with lead, on one of side of which is to be a scuttle to enter the lantern; the scuttle door to be an

iron frame covered with copper. The outside to be well-pointed with Roman cement and white-washed twice over..."

And so it went for many pages, with the Collector of Customs at Cleveland, A.W. Wadsworth, describing the structure and its adjacent dwelling in great detail. A separate bid allowed for the fitting up of the lantern with "patent

lamps and reflectors, tin butts for keeping the oil, and all the necessary apparatus, in the same manner as the light-houses of the United States have been fitted up by Mr. Winslow Lewis." The actual contract for construction was also comprehensive. It was signed on June 16, 1825.

Jonathan Goldsmith, a Connecticut native who had moved to Painesville, Ohio in 1811, won the construction bid for \$2,900. He completed the tower and keeper's house in the fall of 1825 but soon became embroiled in a dispute over the cellar beneath the keeper's house, which he claimed was not included in the plans he had been given. He submitted an exorbitant bid for the addition of the cellar. Since Wadsworth was ill at the time, and the expense of hiring another contractor was prohibitive, he had no alternative other than to accept Goldsmith's high price. This brought the total bill for the project to \$5,032—almost twice Goldsmith's original bid. Wadsworth did manage to get Goldsmith to build a cheap fence around the station as part of the price.

Though a respected Western Reserve architect, Goldsmith's work came into question within a decade of completion of the lighthouse and quarters. The foundation of the tower settled so much it became necessary to replace it in a costly and time-consuming project in 1835. An ironic turn of events occurred six years later when Goldsmith applied for the position of light-



Two men strolled down to the beach at Fairport Harbor in 1912, passing the lighthouse and keeper's dwelling, seen from the back. At the top of the hill a streetcar was rounding the corner. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.

keeper. Political patronage was commonplace at the time, and a naval officer friend of Goldsmith's pressured for his appointment. Goldsmith was denied when his application fell into the hands of Congressman Joshua Giddings, a public servant far ahead of his time. Giddings responded:

"I have laid down a rule for my own guidance from which I do not like to depart. That is to lay all papers on the subject of appointments before the proper officers, and if inquired as to character of the applicant or those who sign his application, frankly to state all I know upon the subject and then leave the matter to rest and place the responsibility upon the officer making the appointment."

The position was given to a local man named Samuel Butler, the first of seventeen keepers—principles and assistants—to serve at Fairport Lighthouse. All men, they staffed the station during the active shipping season on Lake Erie, from April through December, and then extinguished the light during the winter when the lake was frozen and no shipping could move. Most took other jobs in winter, such as cutting ice or logging. One is rumored to have been an itinerant preacher who plied the local pulpits when Lake Erie turned hard as stone.

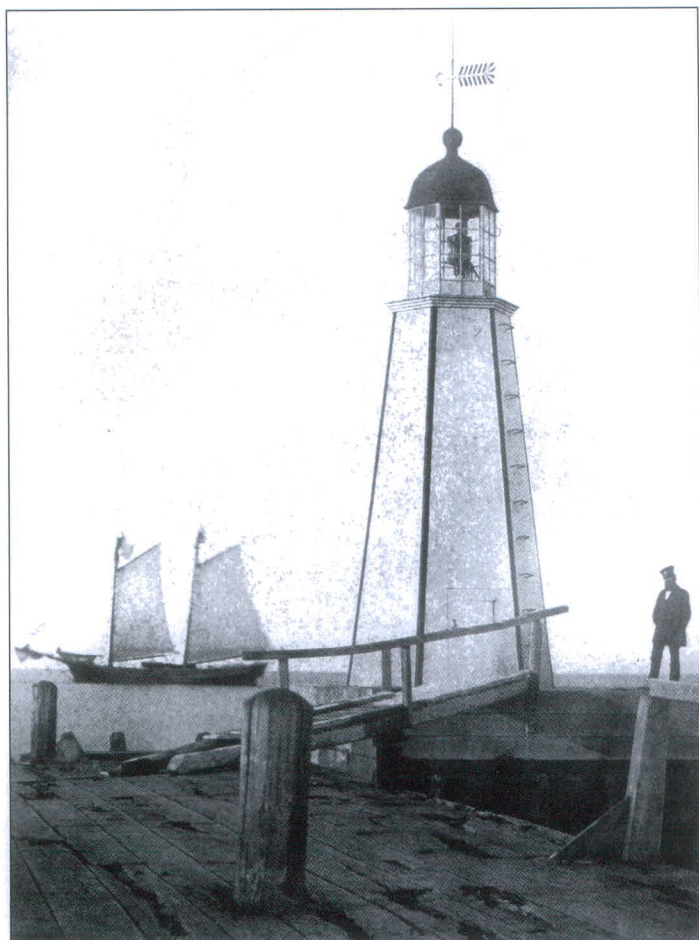


Dorothy Wickland, niece of keeper Daniel Babcock, spent much of her childhood at the lighthouse with her uncle. Her vivid memories detail the pleasant life there: "Christmas was the most exciting time of year because about that time you would get the telegraph from Buffalo to close the harbor lights for winter. Then you would be on vacation until March [and] the end of the season meant the end of the trips on the east pier. In summer, vegetables and preserves were grown in the family garden on the flat ground down the hill...pumpkins for pies were grown and harvested in that fine garden. There was even a cow on the lightkeeper's farm."



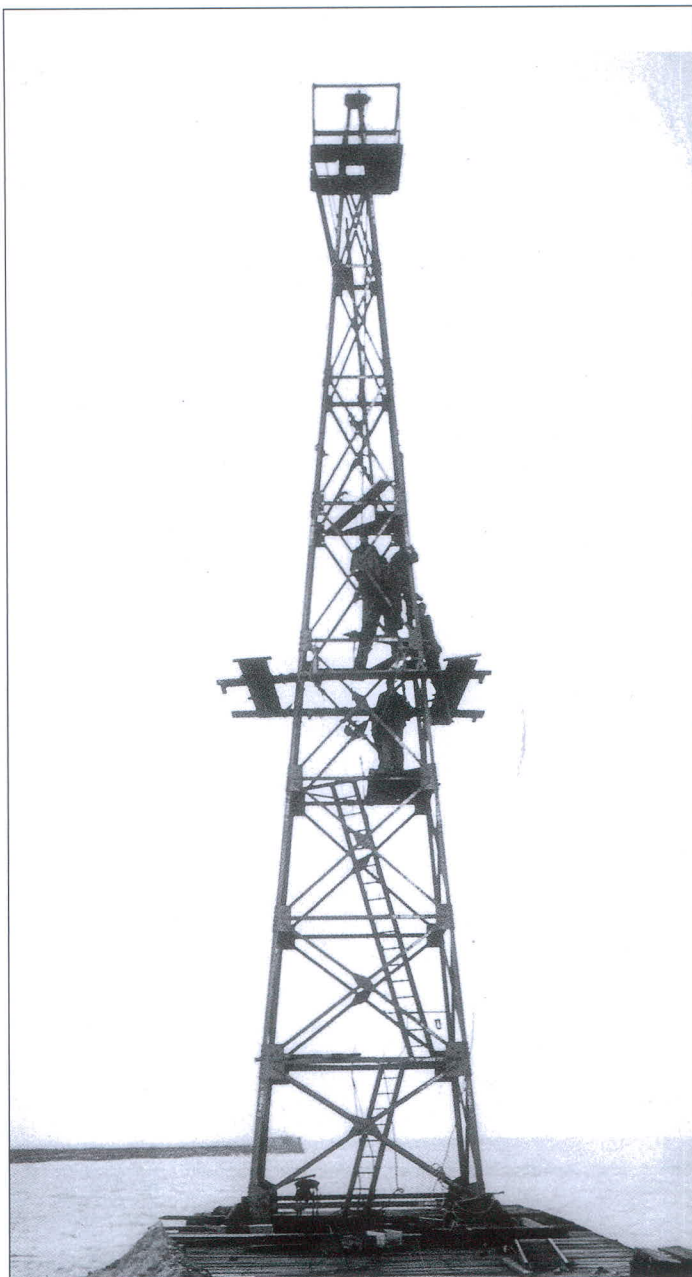
The light station was a pastoral scene in the late 1890s when the Babcocks kept it shipshape. Note the curtains drawn around the lantern to protect the lens, and the oilhouse to the right of the tower. A tidy fence enclosed the compound. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.

Samuel Butler was a staunch abolitionist who gave the lighthouse its nickname, "Freedom Light." He converted the cellar of the lighthouse into a refuge for runaway slaves, making it a valuable link in the famous Underground Railroad. "Follow the Drinking Gourd to Freedom Light" became the mantra of many runaways, who used the stars of the Big Dipper to find their way north to Fairport Harbor and then the beam of the lighthouse to find refuge. Parmley Mansion, near the lighthouse, had a spacious walled-off cellar with a tunnel leading down to Lake Erie. Slaves came to the lighthouse in darkness and were concealed in the dwelling basement. When the time was right, they were moved to Parmley Mansion to await a ship for Canada. Schooners in the business of moving runaway slaves dropped anchor off the lighthouse and signaled to the mansion when they were ready for passengers. The mansion then signaled back, telling how many slaves were moving and when they would send them. This covert practice continued off and on through the tenures of several more lightkeepers, right up to 1869 when the old lighthouse was demolished. It's estimated that upwards of five-hun-



Above – The first East Pierhead Light, also called the Grand River Beacon, was constructed in the 1830s as an octagonal wooden tower. Local merchants tended the pierhead beacon until 1871, when the keeper of the new main light at Fairport Harbor became responsible for the light on the pier. Access to the lantern was via ten narrow steps built into the exterior wall (visible on the right side of the tower) which became treacherous in icy weather. The image was taken in October 1859 during the tenure of keeper Halsey H. Baker. Photo courtesy of National Archives.

Right – The West Pierhead tower, built in 1875, replaced an earlier wooden tower. Note the steep ladder used to reach the small exposed beacon. Photo courtesy of Tim Harrison.



dred escaped slaves used Fairport Light to gain their freedom.

In the meantime, the town of Fairport had grown considerably. Pierheads were built in the 1820s to guide shipping into the harbor and protect it from storm winds. A beacon was placed on the east pierhead in 1834. A report to the Secretary of the Treasury by naval Lieutenant C.T. Platt in 1838 described it: "The beacon on the east pier forming the harbor is lighted with four lamps and is in perfect order. This pier extends six hundred feet into the lake; the west pier nine hundred feet. By bringing the lighthouse and beacon in range, incoming from the west, there is no difficulty in entering the harbor."

The West Pierhead Light was a trun-

cated wooden skeleton tower with a small, exposed lens-lantern on its top. The East Pierhead Light was constructed a few years later, a hexagonal wooden tower with a lantern enclosing a lens-lantern. These towers were rebuilt in later years as the piers were enlarged and extended.

Fairport served as a fueling station and supply harbor for vessels headed to other ports on the lakes. Many of the ships carried pioneers and all their earthly belongings and supplies from oil of peppermint to upright pianos, from livestock to lumber, sailed into the harbor and passed under the scrutiny of the lighthouse keepers, whose job included keeping records of incoming and outgoing marine traffic and

collecting wharf fees. In 1847 alone, during the service of keeper Isaac Spear, 2,987 vessels entered Fairport Harbor with cargoes valued at almost a million dollars.

By the time the Civil War began, the lighthouse was in terrible condition. Its new third order Fresnel lens embraced the advanced lighting technology adopted by the Lighthouse Board, but the optic was too heavy for the lantern floor. An 1868 inspection revealed that one of the iron bands supporting the tower had snapped, and the keeper's dwelling was dilapidated. The tower was braced to stand through the winter of 1868-69 while plans were made for a new lighthouse. A temporary beacon was erected and lit in the winter of 1869 so that the old tower could be dismantled.

With an appropriation of \$30,000, work began on the new Fairport Harbor Lighthouse on April 4, 1870. Rather than repeat the same mistake Goldsmith had made with the old foundation, contractors for the new structure prepared an elaborate crib some 12-feet deep, with piles encased in concrete and a grillage of 12-inch timbers. The gray Berea sandstone tower was built on top of this sturdy base and completed up to its twenty-ninth course when work was halted due to suspension of funds. Post Civil War spending had nearly depleted the U.S. Treasury, and other more critical projects took precedence. An unpainted board cover protected the tower during the interim period, but the exposed skeleton of the keeper's house began to deteriorate almost immediately under the constant pummeling of Lake Erie wind and rain.

In the spring of 1871 when work resumed, an additional \$10,000 was required to rebuild the house. On August 11, 1871 a light shone in the new tower for the first time, produced by lard oil lamps positioned inside the glistening fixed third-order Fresnel lens. The illuminating apparatus, with its hundreds of



The pierhead and breakwater beacons endured the worst punishment Lake Erie winters could inflict. A storm in December 1911 left the West Breakwater Light encased in ice and made slippery work for the lightkeeper until the beacon was closed down for the winter. What appears to be a Dalen sun valve on top of the tower, to automatically turn the light on and off, may have given the keeper a reprieve. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.



A view of the second East Pierhead Light, looking south on June 5, 1911, shows the long concrete pier and the old main lighthouse on the hill in the background. Photo courtesy of National Archives.

prisms and huge convex belt of focusing glass, was encased in a handsome brass framework and pedestal. The entire mechanism weighed about a ton. Keeping this magnificent jewel polished and operating daily was the bane of the lightkeepers, assuaged only by the knowledge that its beneficial beam reached 18-miles over the troubled waters of Lake Erie.

The 1872 *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Treasury* noted:

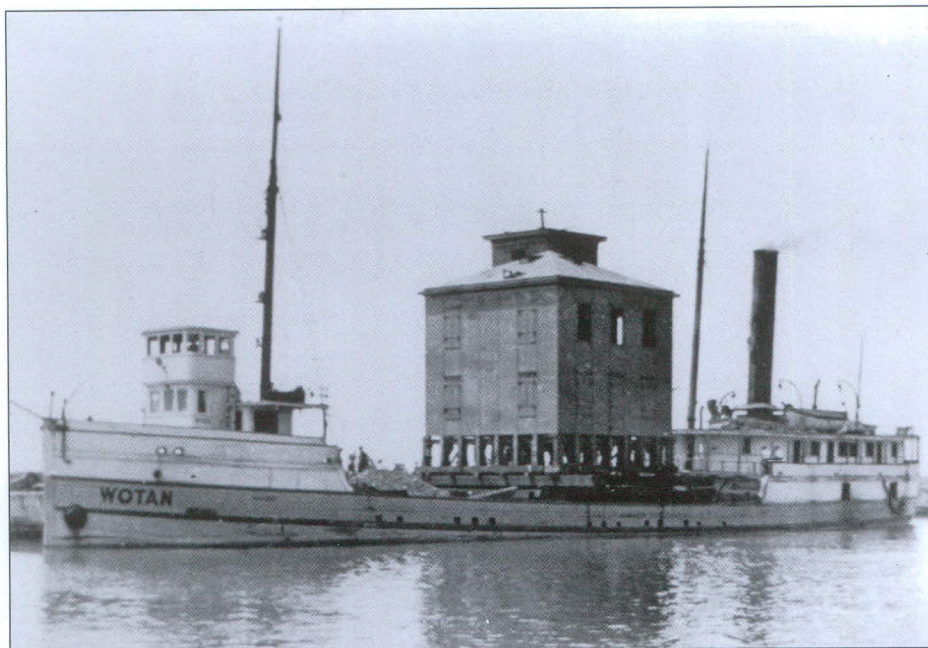
"Work in progress at date of last report was so far completed as to exhibit the light from the new tower on the 11th of August 1871. The new building [dwelling] and oil room were completed 20th of October 1871. The order of the original light was not changed. The east pier of the entrance to the harbor of this station is being extended 400 feet, and as the frame beacon is very old and needs renewing, it should be taken down and a new frame beacon should be erected at the pierhead of the new extension. An appropriation is required of \$3,400."

The quarters were completed in October 1871, but it wasn't until November that the keeper and his family could move in. Captain Joseph C. Babcock, whose family would tend the lighthouse for the remainder of its career,

rented a house in town until his quarters were ready. Cost for the new tower and Babcock's dwelling was almost six times that of the original lighthouse built by Goldsmith in 1825. The new tower was 70-feet high and had a spiral iron staircase with 69 steps leading to the light room. The tower was whitewashed in its early years of service, but later wore its natural gray garb. It was easy for approaching vessels to see, day or night, since it was situated on a slender finger of land elevated 102-feet above the lake on the east side of the river entrance.

The Babcocks, one of Fairport's pioneering families, tended the lighthouse for more than fifty years (1871-1925) and are its most remembered keepers. Captain Joseph C. Babcock led a colorful life, beginning with his birth on February 19, 1843 in a house a few blocks down the street from the lighthouse. At the age of eight, his life supposedly was spared at an Indian massacre in Sandusky by a friend of the family, a Wyandot. (Some sources say the Wyandot was his mother, but census records indicate Mary Ann Allen Babcock was from Connecticut.)

Joseph C. Babcock marched off to fight in the Civil War in 1862, then returned to his



The shell of the West Breakwater Lighthouse (shown below after completion) was prefabricated in Buffalo, New York and shipped to Fairport Harbor on the steamer *Wotan*. It arrived at the pier in June 1925. Pre-fabrication of lighthouses, or at least parts of them, was less costly than on-site construction. In the background is the unfinished West Breakwater Lighthouse constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers. Photo from the U. S. Lighthouse Society archives.

hometown in 1865 to work in mercantile and lumber trades. Like many revered war veterans, he was offered a lightkeeping position. He was twenty-eight in 1871 when he took the lighthouse keys from George F. Rogers. The 1879 Treasury Registry lists his salary at \$500 per

year and his assistant's salary at \$400. Ironically, his assistant in 1879 was his brother, George F. Babcock. Babcock's son, Daniel, served as assistant keeper from 1901-1919, then as head keeper until the lighthouse was decommissioned in 1925. Captain Babcock's



The new steel-walled West Breakwater Lighthouse was the pride of Fairport when it went into service in the summer of 1925. The lantern had a fourth order lens that flashed white every three seconds. The dwelling was spacious, but the air diaphone foghorn, seen projecting from the upper portion of the tower, probably made for many sleepless nights. Photo from the U. S. Lighthouse Society archives.

brother, Frank Babcock, was the first keeper of the Coast Guard Station in Fairport at the foot of "Lighthouse Hill."

Three of Joseph C. Babcock's children, Daniel, Hattie, and Robbie, spent their youth in the lighthouse. In 1871 when Captain Babcock was appointed keeper, Daniel was three and Hattie was one. Robbie was born in the lighthouse dwelling a few years later but died of smallpox at age five. Mrs. Babcock was inconsolable and spent many months in bed following the child's death, possibly suffering from depression. To cheer her, Captain Babcock gave her a new kitten, and from her bed she would toss a small ball for the kitten to chase and retrieve. Later, the little cat disappeared.

The death of Robbie Babcock and the loss of Mrs. Babcock's kitten have spawned tales of ghosts in the light station dwelling. The boy's ghost is believed to haunt the downstairs of the current lighthouse museum. Museum staff describe him as "a presence of dread" sometimes accompanied by cold air and a foul smell of decay. Pamela Brent, curator of the museum in the early 1990s, also remembers a shadowy catlike form that was seen from time to time in her apartment, which occupied the old upstairs bedrooms the Babcocks once used. She believed the apparition was one of the many beloved felines belonging to Mrs. Babcock, perhaps the vanished kitten.

In a 2001 interview with a local newspaper Brent said: "It [the kitten] would skitter across the floor near the kitchen like it was playing. I would catch glimpses of it from time to time. Then, one evening, I felt its presence when it jumped on the bed. I felt its weight pressing on me."

The newspaper interview coincided with a surprising discovery in the light station basement. Workers installing air conditioning vents in the crawlspace beneath the dwelling had discovered the desiccated body of a long-dead cat. Museum docents were quick to say the dead cat was Mrs. Babcock's disappearing kitten. The feline corpse was placed on display in the museum and has become a popular artifact with visitors, especially children.

The speculative drama of vanished kittens and restless spirits aside, a more solid history was recorded in the lightkeepers' logbooks. *The Annual Report of the Lighthouse Board* for 1893 reported:

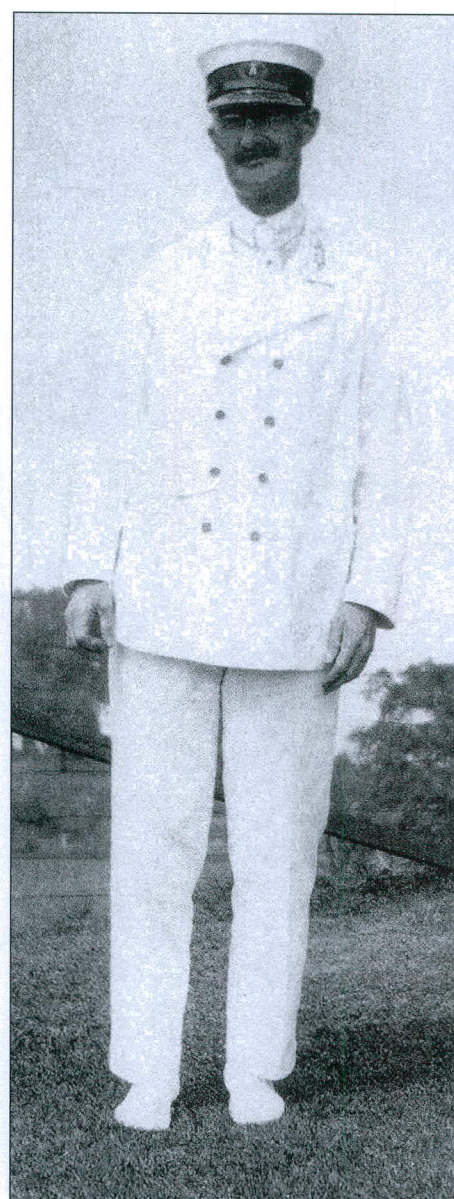
"On November 21, 1892 the steamer *Canisteo* with the schooner *Stewart* in tow, in entering the harbor during a southwest gale,



Above – Captain Joseph Babcock, a survivor of the Sandusky Indian massacre and a Civil War veteran, served the longest keepership at Fairport Harbor Lighthouse, from 1871-1919. Photo courtesy of Tim Harrison.



Center – Dressed in his blue wool keeper's uniform, Daniel J. Babcock was photographed on February 4, 1909 with his hands in his pockets, perhaps due to the cold weather. The backdrop appears to be the door of the summer kitchen. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.



Right– Last keeper of the old main light, Daniel Babcock posed for the camera in his summer uniform. He served as assistant to his father from 1901-1919, then as principal keeper until 1925. Photo courtesy of Tim Harrison.

Below right –The Fairport Keepers' Thanksgiving dinner in 1912 was held at the Third Street home of Assistant Keeper, Daniel Babcock, seated far left. His wife sits at the end of the table. Principal Keeper, Joseph Babcock, is seated second from right. Mrs. Joseph Babcock, who was bedridden at the lighthouse for many months, is seated third from left. Hattie Babcock is at her mother's right and her husband, Elias Warren, is at far right. The little girl is Dorothy Wickland, Daniel Babcock's niece. Photo courtesy of Fairport Marine Museum.





The third order Henry-Lapaute Fresnel lens from the lighthouse was retired to the town library after the lighthouse was decommissioned in 1925. It was later given to the Fairport Marine Museum. The lens, shown from the front, has 216° of glass and 144° of silvered copper reflectors on its back side. In its final years of service, it operated with an incandescent oil vapor lamp. Photo courtesy of Kraig Anderson.

slightly damaged the wooden beacon on the outer end of the east pier. As the accident occurred while the vessels were making an attempt to enter the harbor for shelter from the gale and was due to stress of weather, no claim for damages was made."

In the same report, the Board suggested \$400 be appropriated for a range light to work in concert with the east Pierhead light, and also that a fog signal be established at Fairport Harbor. Congress authorized the fog signal, not to exceed \$4,300, but no appropriation of funds was made. In 1907, the issue was taken up again by the Department of Commerce, which suggested a fogbell could be installed on the east breakwater for \$2,500. The Lighthouse Board recommended an appropriation in the same amount. The effort again stalled.

In the meantime, a flood in January 1904 damaged the east pierhead. It was repaired the following autumn. Before the concrete had cured, the steamer *Princeton* struck the pierhead and damaged about 20-feet of the repaired section.

In 1910, the management of navigational aids was handed over to the newly-created Bureau of Lighthouses, headed by a practical and thrifty superintendent named George Putnam. Within months Putnam began tightening up the bureau's purse strings and making more efficient use of funds. He eyed Fairport Harbor as a place to pinch pennies, but first it had to be updated and improved. The 1915 Report of the Secretary of Commerce noted that \$30,000 was needed for improvements at Fairport Harbor, to include new lights on the breakwater and pierheads. The report also said: "the annual number of vessels entering and departing is about 1,300, representing a total registered tonnage of about 300,000." Details of the funding included:

Structure	\$20,000
Illuminating Apparatus	6,500
Boats, piping, etc.	3,000
Total	\$30,000

Estimates must have been low, since an appropriation of \$42,000 was made in June 1917 to improve Fairport Harbor. It provided for a new lighthouse and foghorn on the west breakwater pier head. The plan also spelled doom for old Fairport Harbor Lighthouse, for it

included \$1,600 for the demolition of the light tower. But the nation went to war in Europe before the funds could be spent. Construction of the new west pier head lighthouse was delayed until 1921. A temporary wooden skeleton tower was built and topped with a lens-lantern. It was tended by the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse keeper.

In 1921, the boxy iron shell of the pier head sentinel was prefabricated at Buffalo Lighthouse Depot and then shipped 147-miles to Fairport Harbor. The shell consisted of "steel studding, floor beams, rafters, side and roof plating, and cast-iron cornices, sills and lintels" all riveted together. It arrived on the steamer *Wotan* on the afternoon of June 21, 1921 and was lifted onto the pierhead with a crane and then capped with a lantern. The 38-foot sentinel with its fourth order flashing lens was placed in service a few weeks later. About \$10,000 had been saved by prefabricating much of the lighthouse. The sensible and penurious Putnam diverted the savings to other lighthouse projects in the Great Lakes, but not before he set aside the \$1,600 needed for the demolition of the elder sentinel.

Public outcry at the loss of Fairport Harbor Lighthouse was overwhelming. Putnam had not expected such opposition and chalked it up to local sentimentality. Feeling certain the protests would die down, he temporarily shelved demolition plans, left the light in service, and then seemed to forget about Fairport



Fairport Marine Museum is one of the oldest lighthouse museums in the nation. In the summer of 1992, state flags were flying in front of the lighthouse. The pilothouse of the freighter *Frontenac* can be seen on the end of the dwelling. Photo courtesy of Fairport Harbor Tourism Council.

Harbor. The lighthouse continued to operate a few more years, then was extinguished in its centennial year, 1925—hence the catch phrase “The Light that Shone a Hundred Years.”

Great Lakes mariners were pleased to see how well-marked Fairport Harbor was, even if the old main light was gone. Four beacons stood on the pierheads and breakwaters:

East Breakwater Light, 20 feet above water, visible 8 miles, flashing red

West Breakwater Light, 52 feet above water, visible 12 miles, flashing white

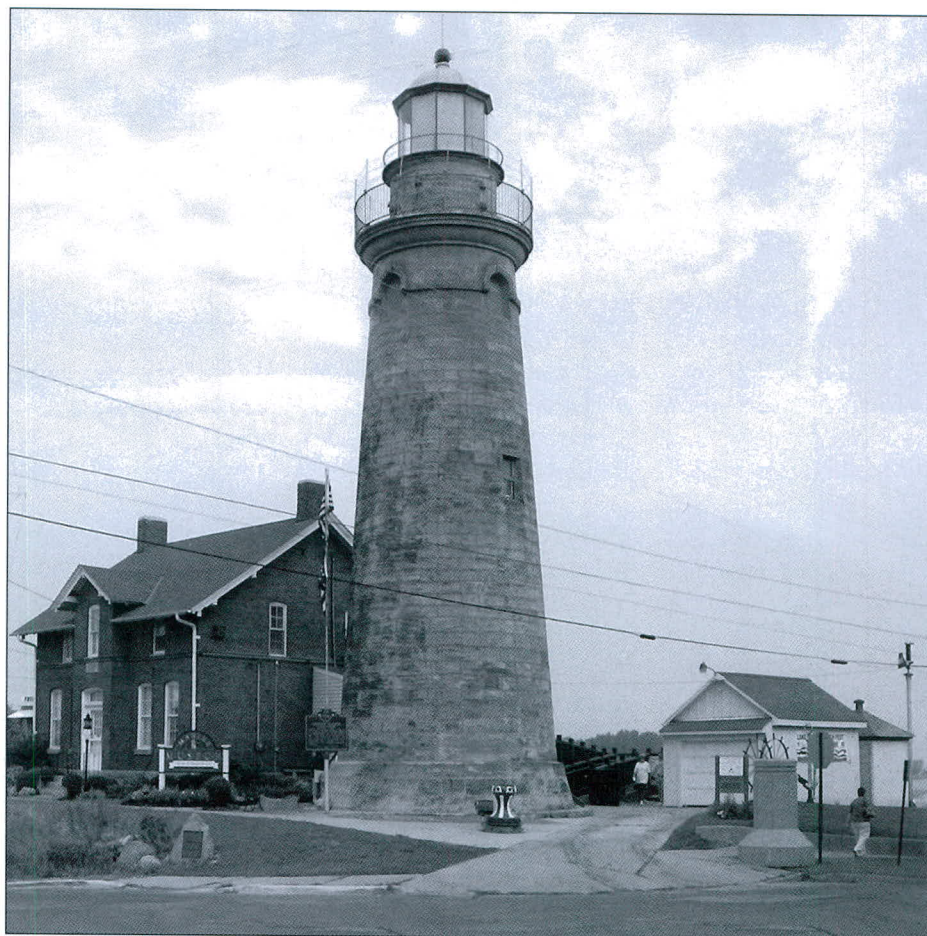
East Pierhead Light, 37 feet tall, visible 12 miles, flashing white

West Pierhead Light, 74 feet tall, visible 12 miles, occulting white every two seconds

For several years, personnel from the nearby Coast Guard Station used the lighthouse dwelling as quarters. But it was never a home for them and, soon, apathy and obsolescence took a toll. Weeds grew up around the lighthouse, paint peeled on the woodwork and iron lantern, and cobwebs festooned the windows like lace curtains. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 were a lifetime away. Yet, the citizens of Fairport grasped the importance of saving their lighthouse from the wrecking ball. Bound together by affection for the historic sentinel and an emerging sense of obligation to preserve the maritime heritage of Lake Erie and the important role the tower had played in national history, they patiently waited for a chance to claim the site.

George Putnam passed the superintendence of the Bureau of Lighthouses to Harold D. King in 1935. Commissioner King lacked Putnam's parsimonious character, though he ran an efficient office and continued Putnam's program of modernization and automation. He had barely taken the reins of the bureau and was planning a grand celebration of the Lighthouse Service's 150th birthday when President Franklin Roosevelt announced the transfer of all navigational aids to the U.S. Coast Guard. The change took effect in July 1939.

Ironically, the transfer included the abandoned main lighthouse at Fairport Harbor, since the Lighthouse Service still owned the station. By this time, a city caretaker was living in the old keepers' dwelling, if only to deter vandalism and keep the site from becoming too much of an eyesore. Again, the idea of razing the station was revived. Again, it met with opposition. In 1941 the citizens of Fair-



The 184 year old lighthouse has undergone many changes, including electrification. Wires are the bane of today's photographers seeking a clear view. Photo courtesy of Patti Nelson.

port managed to secure a stay of execution for the lighthouse by negotiating a five-year revocable lease on the property. Then, World War II began and Coast Guard energy was diverted elsewhere. When the lease expired in 1946, the citizens of Fairport were ready with an alternative—community care and a public museum.

“Being a landmark in a small, close-knit community was the key,” remembers former curator, Pamela Brent. “Many lighthouses are too remote to really belong to a community, and except for their keepers there's probably no one intimately tied to them. The people of Fairport banded together to save their lighthouse because it had become something more than an old abandoned building. The government was surprised that people felt so strongly about the lighthouse. It wouldn't surprise anyone today, but back then it was something new.”

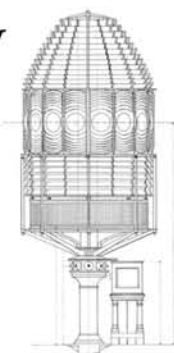
The Fairport Historical Society had launched in 1945 and a plan was hatched to restore the old lighthouse and convert it into a marine museum. Little by little, the project took shape. On July 4, 1946 the museum was

dedicated. The light tower was opened for climbing. The third order lens was retrieved from the town library and put on display. The pilothouse from the Great Lakes freighter *Frontenac* was adjoined to one end of the dwelling, and the mast from the USS *Wolverine* was brought to the grounds to serve as a flagpole. A lifecar and Lyle gun from the Lifesaving Service were acquired. Artifacts, paintings, models, and photos were gathered to tell the story of the lighthouses of Fairport Harbor and shipping on Lake Erie. In 1953, knowing the lighthouse and dwelling were in good hands, the Coast Guard gave the deed to the property to the town.

Today, Fairport Marine Museum is ranked as one of the best lighthouse museums in the nation. It is certainly one of the oldest, possibly rivaled only by Old Stonington Lighthouse in Connecticut. The museum is open Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays 1:00-6:00 p.m. Memorial Day through Labor Day. Group tours are given year-round by special arrangement. For information about the museum, write: Fairport Marine Museum, 129 Second St., Fairport Harbor, OH 44077 or call 440.354.4825.



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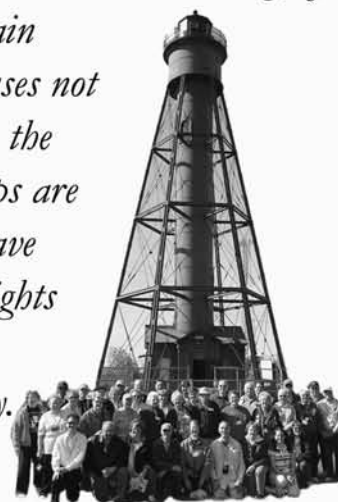
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Tinicum Lighthouse, NJ