

The Lighthouse Depots of Lake Michigan

Part II of II

By Thomas A. Tag

Introduction



In August 2009, I was privileged to attend one of the USLHS's 25th Anniversary dinners that were held around the country, this one in Saint Joseph, Michigan. We toured the old Saint Joseph Supply and Buoy Depot and had several long discussions about the depots and the fact that there was very little information about how they worked, who manned them, and their general history. After the dinner, I resolved to learn what I could about the history of these depots. I began to collect data and started with a long interview with James Woodward, who worked for the Coast Guard and was trained by a Lighthouse Service lampist. Thanks to Jim's information and information from many other sources I was able to write this story.

In *The Keeper's Log*, Volume 27, Issue 1, I covered the early years of the depots and those in Detroit, St. Joseph, and the Ninth District office in Chicago.

Milwaukee Temporary Depot 1900-1905

What follows is a chronology of the Temporary Milwaukee Depot taken from the *Annual Reports of the Lighthouse Board*.

1900: A temporary storehouse, 16 feet by 100 feet in plan, with 10-foot posts, was built at the westerly end of the north pier at Milwaukee. The floor is of 2-inch matched Norway, on 4-inch by 6-inch and 4-inch by 4-inch sleepers, which in turn rest upon 8-inch by 8-inch timbers, which are placed on a stone pier. The dock in front is 5 feet 8 inches wide the entire length, with steps at each end. There are four sliding doors—three facing the dock south and one at the north corner for receiving local deliveries. A small office occupies the southwest corner. The east end of

the structure is partitioned off for use as a lamp shop, having seven windows and one outside sliding door; also a double door connecting it with the warehouse. Seven wire guards for the windows, a heating stove, a lock with night latch, a sink, and a padlock were provided. A telephone was placed in the temporary storehouse.

The easterly end of the temporary storehouse received interior sheathing over the building paper and was fitted up as a temporary machine shop. Machinery and tools for fitting up the district machine shop were purchased. The engine was placed on a brick and cement foundation and bolted, the gasoline tank was placed on stringers outside of the building, and the milling machine and lathe were placed in position. The machinery, belting, pulleys, hangers, and shafting



The Milwaukee Temporary Depot circa 1905. It is the cluster of buildings in the lake. Photo from old postcard.

were placed and adjusted; and the machinery was tested and found to be satisfactory. Six malleable clamps, two 6-inch stovepipe elbows, one length of 6-inch stovepipe, an iron casting, and patterns were purchased. A foot lathe, with drills, lathe tools, etc., was purchased for general use in the fielding construction and repair work in the district.

1901: The temporary storehouse has been divided into three portions. The east end is arranged for a machine shop with a small compartment for the storage of illuminating apparatus; the center contains a room for the storage of tools and implements, with a loft over the same for the storage of such articles as rope, wheelbarrows, etc., and another portion is used for the reception of articles for general repair.

1902: The engineer's storehouse, a temporary building, is insufficient for the repair work of the district, and when the construction of new stations is to be undertaken or materials for extensive alterations are to be delivered, there is no place to provide for their accommodation even for the



Map showing the relative locations of the depots and the offices of the Ninth District in Chicago.

shortest time. There is, moreover, a certainty that the building must be moved at an early date when work under contemplation on the repair of the north pier is undertaken by the engineer department.

The District Machine Shop, which occupies nearly one-half of the storehouse, is of great importance. The superintendent charged with the care of the illuminating apparatus has been continuously employed here when not in the field.

1903: The work of construction and repair is constantly increasing in this district. The storage facilities in the temporary storehouse and the capacity of the room occupied by the district machine shop are inadequate. The temporary warehouse is situated on the inner end of the north harbor pier; it is occupied by sufferance, and it will be soon needed by the War Department to carry out the work which was authorized by the river and harbor act in the reconstruction of the harbor piers. The temporary storehouse must therefore be removed, and there is at present no site on the waterfront which the Lighthouse Service can obtain except by purchase. The present site is bad for a steamer to lie alongside of, as it is near the channel approaching the harbor, and a vessel lying there is subject to injury from passing steamers. The lighthouse hired tender *Alice M. Gill*, has occupied a berth here at short intervals during the working seasons only, but the lighthouse tender *Hyacinth*, now being built, and which is to be delivered in a few months, must be provided with a wintering berth near Milwaukee, as it will be impracticable to send her so far away as the lighthouse depot at St. Joseph.

1904: The lease for dockage for the lighthouse tender and for storage facilities for the temporary depot was renewed to cover the fiscal year. The grounds were fenced in by the building of some 300 feet of picket fence 6 feet high, with a drive gate and passenger gate. The roadway entering the grounds was improved. The temporary building was used for the reception of material and its storage previous to loading on the *Hyacinth* for transportation to the various stations. The storehouse was leveled up and re-blocked.

The District Machine Shop, which occupies one-half of the storehouse, has been of much service in the work of repairs to illuminating apparatus.

1905: The lease for dockage for the light-

house tender and for temporary storage facilities was renewed to cover four months. The district machine shop was occupied by the machinist and his helper during the closed season and for a great part of the season of navigation in repairing illuminating and fog-signal apparatus.

1906: The use of dockage for the lighthouse tender and for temporary storage facilities was continued from July 1 until January 1, 1906, at which time the grounds were given up.

Milwaukee Supply, Repair, and Buoy Depot

What follows is a chronology of the Milwaukee Supply, Repair, and Buoy Depot taken from the *Annual Reports of the Lighthouse Board*.

1903: The Board thinks that measures should be taken to obtain this urgently needed depot. Inquiries have been made for a site, and none has been found which can be purchased for anything approaching the nominal amount which was anticipated when the recommendation was first made. It is now believed that a proper site would cost \$25,000 on account of the value of waterfront property. The Board therefore estimates that it would cost not less than \$75,000 to establish a lighthouse depot at or near Milwaukee, and it is now recommended that an appropriation of this amount be made therefore.

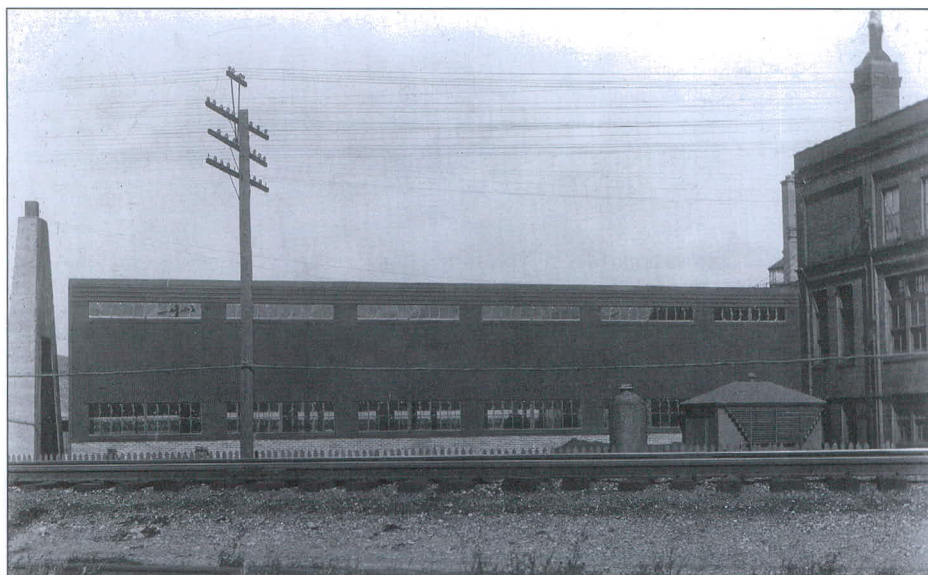
1904: An appropriation of \$75,000 was made by the act approved by Congress on April 28, 1904, for the establishment at or near Milwaukee of a depot for the Ninth Lighthouse District, including the purchase of a site therefore.

1905: A site was purchased on the Kinnickinnic River, at Milwaukee, with 320 feet of waterfront. The cession of jurisdiction by the State to the United States is in course of preparation. Plans and specifications for the building of a revetment and wharf and for the dredging and filling grounds were prepared, and bids, which had been asked by advertisement, were, on June 23, 1905, opened. A bid was accepted, and contracts are now being prepared. The work is to be finished about October 1, 1905, when the temporary depot site can be relinquished and the temporary building and shop can be moved to the United States grounds.

1906: Cession of jurisdiction from the State of Wisconsin to the United States was obtained. The revetment and wharf, under contract, were completed on October 1, 1905, and the temporary buildings and shops were removed from the leased grounds to the United States property. Detailed plans and estimates of cost for a warehouse and of a railroad siding and of introduction of city water were prepared. Bids for construction are to be



The Milwaukee Supply, Repair, and Buoy Depot, 1913. U.S. Coast Guard photo.



The new warehouse. The small building is the powerhouse for the machine shop. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

invited. The right of way was graded and a plank walk was laid from Greenfield Avenue to the northerly entrance of the grounds.

1907: A contract was made for building a storehouse. The structural steel work of the three-story structure was erected as far as the 20 columns of the first story and the first and second tiers of floor beams; and of the one-story structure all 14 columns were erected. City water was introduced, and a concrete vault for the water meter was built.

1908: The lighthouse depot and storehouse containing a machine shop, recently completed, are in good condition. The depot is well adapted and equipped for carrying on the work of the district in an efficient and economical manner. The following repairs and improvements will be required during the fiscal year 1909: Boat-ways for hauling out launches, fitting up old shed for boathouse, paving and grading, fencing, erecting a derrick, adding flooring over the



The Milwaukee Supply, Repair, and Buoy Depot from the air circa 1940. Photo from the author's collection.

ceiling of the custodian's quarters for storage of patterns and the construction of shelving. The estimated cost of the labor and materials required to do the proposed work is \$1,800.

Description of the Milwaukee Supply, Repair, and Buoy Depot from fire insurance records of 1911:

4 Buildings

1) Single story Stock room and Warehouse—fireproof construction, brick and concrete with fire hydrant, attached to the three-story building.

2) Three story building
Stock room on first floor, interior walls tiled on first floor only
Machine shop on second floor – with gasoline powered engine
Living rooms on third floor

3) Single story Tool room with cement floor and walls

4) Single story Receiving dock next to rail spur

(Note: Two additional buildings were added later.)

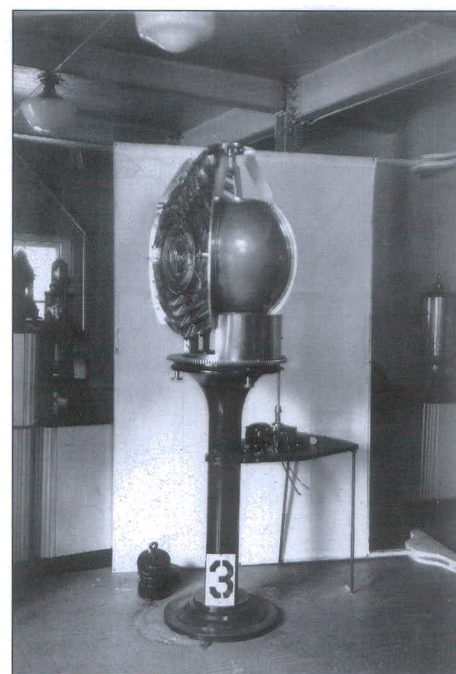
(Note: On September 17, 1913, the headquarters of the Twelfth District were moved from Chicago, Illinois, to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, so that it could be more centrally located within the district. Complaints were made because the Milwaukee Depot was nearly surrounded by coal yards and the dust was objectionable, but no action was taken other than to request a new depot site.

(In 1934: A major addition was made to

the depot. A large warehouse building was built behind, but attached to, the old facility. It was not completed until late 1935.

(The Lighthouse Depot became the Milwaukee Coast Guard Base in 1939 when the Lighthouse Service was transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard.

(In 1967 the U.S. Coast Guard Base Milwaukee moved to its present building for Sector Lake Michigan, and the former base was abandoned with the land returned to the city. All but one of the buildings were torn down.)



A Fresnel lens under repair in the lamp shop circa 1938. Photo courtesy James Woodward collection.

Charlevoix Buoy Repair and Storage Depot

What follows is a chronology of the Charlevoix Buoy Repair and Storage Depot taken from the *Annual Reports of the Lighthouse Board*.

1899: Pursuant to the appropriation of \$15,000 made by the act approved on July 1, 1898, for a depot at Charlevoix, Michigan, a site for the Buoy and Supply Depot at Charlevoix was purchased. The title papers were approved by the United States Attorney General and duly recorded. The site was plotted. General plans and an estimate of the cost for the construction of the



The Charlevoix Buoy Repair and Storage Depot and the custodian's dwelling circa 1914. Photo from the author's collection.

depot were prepared. Detail plans, specifications, and forms for advertising for the construction of the revetment and for dredging a basin, and for filling at the depot, were prepared and bids for doing the work were invited. The work is to be done so that the depot can be of service this fall.

1900: Contracts were made for dredging the waterfront and slip, for back filling and grading the grounds, and for building a pile revetment. The work called for in these contracts was finished during April 1900. 4,500 cubic yards of material having been dredged and dumped into Pine Lake, 4,775 cubic yards used for back filling and grading, and 445 running feet of pile revetment constructed. Plan, general description, and estimate for a warehouse 40 feet wide by 90 feet long were prepared, and proposals for furnishing the material were invited by posters and circular letters. The materials for

the construction of the warehouse were delivered by a lighthouse tender.

1901: This depot is practically finished. The warehouse was completed in September of 1900. It consists of a one-story brick building 40 feet wide by 90 feet long with seven steel trusses. The depot grounds were enclosed with a fence. One handcar and four buoy carriages, with steel frames and rollers to roll directly upon the handcar, were provided, the buoy carriages being so constructed as to receive the large compressed gas buoys as in a cradle. A tramway 560 feet long was laid. The small dwelling already on the site when this ground was purchased was repaired for the custodian.

1902: A buoy carriage was made at the Milwaukee storehouse and delivered to this depot. This completed the work on this depot, using the full amount of the funds appropriated for its construction.

1905: This depot is in good condition.

1906: This depot is utilized for the storage and overhauling of buoys for the northern part of the district. With the exception of the dwelling it is in good condition.

1907: This depot is used for the storage and overhauling of buoys for the northern end of the lake.

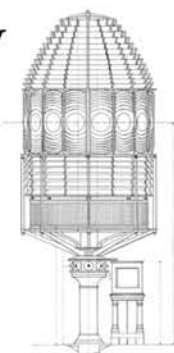
1908: The storehouse and wharf are in excellent condition. The dwelling, an old dilapidated building, caught on fire on May 5, 1908, owing to a defective flue.

(Note: The Charlevoix Buoy Repair and Storage buildings are still there, although no longer used for lighthouse purposes.)

Now you have the story of the lighthouse depots of Lake Michigan, how they came to be, and their history until today.



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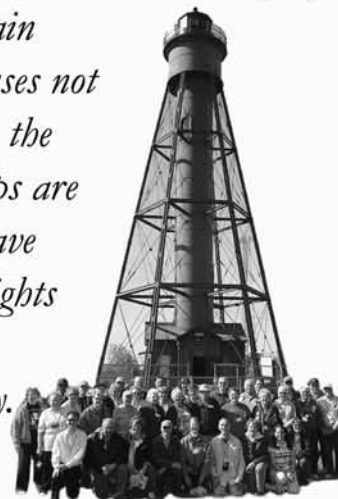
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Tinicum Lighthouse, NJ