



LUDLAM BEACH, NJ LIGHTHOUSE

By George Worthylake

In the early 1880's the Lighthouse Service realized a need for a lighthouse between the Absecon station at Atlantic City, New Jersey and the Hereford Inlet Lighthouse at North Wildwood. The site selected was at Sea Isle City, 17 miles south of Atlantic City and 11 miles north of Hereford Inlet. This site would provide a navigational aid between the two lighthouses and assist mariners to steer clear of a shoal off nearby Townsend Inlet.

In 1884, plans and specifications for a frame lighthouse and keeper's dwelling were completed and lots numbered 15 & 16 in Sea Isle City were purchased. Proposals were invited for building the structure in early 1885.



Ludlam Beach Lighthouse circa 1908. Summer cottages and beach front just past the flag pole. Photo courtesy of Robert Lewis.

The light was first shown by Keeper J.H. Reeves on November 3, 1885. A 4th order Fresnel lens provided the characteristic of a flashing white light every 15 seconds. The station was described as a combination dwelling and tower "surrounded by a timber bulkhead, filled with sand and gravel and graded to prevent the wash from high tides." The cost was \$5,000, including the land.

The Ludlam Beach station was situated on a barrier island and only 15 feet above sea level. This situation proved to be a continuous and costly maintenance headache for the service and it eventually doomed the station.

The 1889 Report of the Lighthouse Board states, "Temporary repairs were made to the sea wall, which was badly broken up by the severe storms and unusually high tides of the past fall and spring. Arrangements were made for putting in a new and stronger wall..."

The next year the Report stated, "Much damage was done to this station by the storm of September 19, 1889, and the danger of its destruction was such that it became necessary to take out the illuminating apparatus [4th order Fresnel lens] and to abandon the light-house during the continuance of the storm [hurricane]. A

new wooden sea-wall on the ocean front, with a return of 40 feet on each side [of the dwelling], had just been completed and was not apparently hurt, but the old wall, connecting with it and extending around the rear of the site, was broken on both its upper and lower sides, most of the filling was washed out and the upper and part of the rear and front foundation walls of the lighthouse and dwelling were undermined. The foundation walls were rebuilt and the chimney was underpinned. A new wooden sea-wall, extending across the rear of the light-house lot, with a return of 50 feet on each side connecting it with the wall on the front, was built and filled in with sand and a top dressing of gravel."

The following year the Lighthouse Board reported that the station, "...was in urgent need of protection from the action of the sea..."

A brick oil house was added to the station in 1895 and the illuminate switched from lard oil to kerosene.

In 1897 the Service noted that the bulkhead was strengthened, but the station might have to be moved back in a few years. Two years later a contract was let to construct a concrete seawall to replace the wooden wall. In that year the station received a telephone and signal flags. The

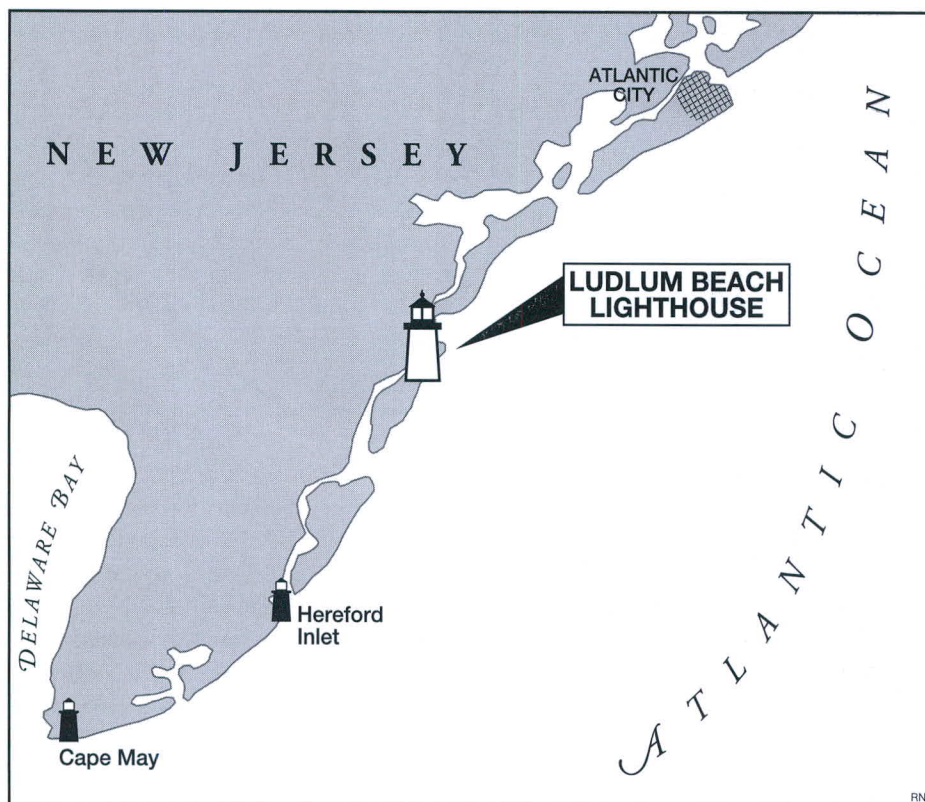
new concrete seawall was finished in 1900. Another concrete seawall was constructed in 1907 and city water was installed.

A severe storm in 1914 caused damage to the protective seawall. By this time the Lighthouse Service was fed up with pouring money into the seawall and was reluctant to make repairs. The Superintendent, J.T. Yates, wrote to headquarters, "This station is not a very important station and it is not considered that a great deal should be expended in protecting same, until more urgent cases have been cared for elsewhere."

Finally, on November 21, 1923, a fire sealed the fate of the station. Apparently the keeper's cat or dog knocked over a kerosene lamp the keeper had left burning in the kitchen when he went to bed. Realizing the lighthouse was on fire, and his hall filled with smoke, he left via the bedroom window. When a fire extinguisher and garden hose were unable to douse the flames, he ran to a nearby Coast Guard station for assistance.

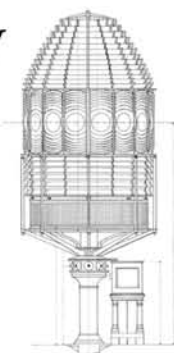
The fire was eventually extinguished, but the kitchen was gutted and a third of the roof was lost. Temporary repairs were made. Before a permanent roof could be installed, a storm tore away the temporary covering, making the dwelling uninhabitable. A short while later, a minor optic was placed on a skeleton tower as a replacement aid and the dwelling was sold to a private party. It was originally moved to the corner of 31st Street. In the 1940's it was relocated to its present location at 3414 Landis Ave., Sea Isle City, New Jersey and today serves as a private residence.

For forty years the Ludlam Beach Lighthouse was a quaint fixture on the beach at Sea Isle City. It appeared much like the nearby summer homes, with only the lantern room setting it apart from the other dwellings. On summer nights its beam of light swept the beach over the young people who gathered to bill and coo. It was a picture post card of vacation memories and it seems like...Only Yesterday!





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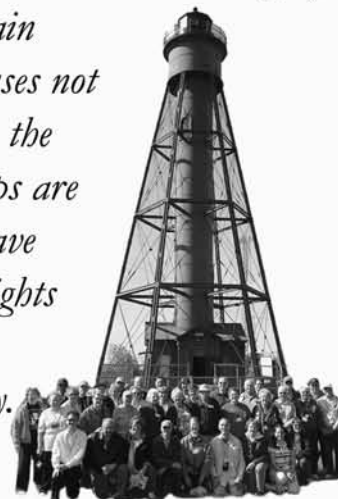
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