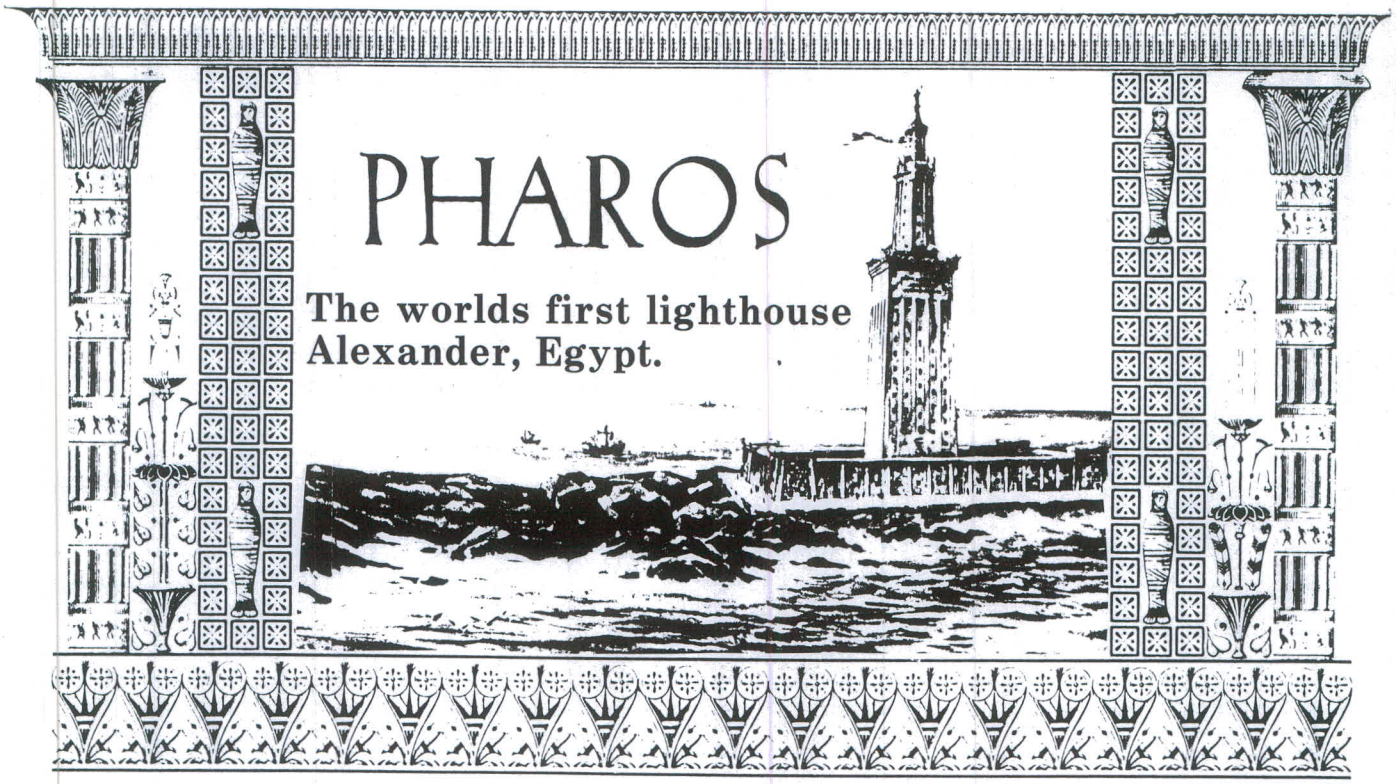
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by Wayne Wheeler

Of all the structures conceived by man only the lighthouse transends borders, nationalities and classes of people. The lighthouse stands alone, and has so for over 2,000 years, a symbol of security, safety, peace, solitude and dependability ... and to some, romance. Seafaring nations around the world have constructed lighthouses over the ages of designs to suit the local geography, of material of the region and with the technology of the era. Since the dawn of written history lighthouses have graced the shores of the world to the point that they might indeed be deemed indigineous to the coast. George Bernard Shaw once remarked that the lighthouse was the only form of pure altruism in building known to him.

But what was the FIRST lighthouse, the first beacon to guide a weary mariner to a safe port at days end? Most certainly open beach fires served as guiding lights to early fishermen in dugout canoes or on crude rafts. The earliest lighthouses, of which records exist, were the towers built by the Libyans and Cushites in Lower Egypt, beacon fires maintained in towers by priests. Lesches (a Greek poet circa 600 B.C.) mentions a lighthouse at Sigeum in the Troad which was the site of Troy in Asia Minor. Homer spoke of pillars of fire leading into the seaport of Athens.

The first lighthouse that we have firm evidence of that was constructed solely as a lighthouse was the wonderous Pharos of Alexandria, Egypt. The structure was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and was certainly the tallest lighthouse ever constructed. The tower was located on the Island of Pharos (we do not know if the island gave the name to the lighthouse, or the lighthouse to the island). Pharos meant, "To the sun" and it is from this name that the word Pharology was coined. Pharology - The art or science treating of lighthouses and signal lights.

Alexander the Great founded the city of Alexandria, Egypt in 332 B.C. shortly after he occupied that country. The city is located on the western extreminty of the Nile delta and is situated partially on the mainland and partially on the island of Pharos, the two being connected by a causeway. The city grew rapidly and for several centuries was second in importance only to Rome.

Alexandria was also the seat of government of the Ptolemies (pronounced TOL. AMIES), the Macedonian kings who ruled Egypt after the death of Alexander.

Ptolemy I, had been a loyal aide and friend of Alexander. In 300 B.C. he started the construction of the lighthouse at Pharos as a guide to mariners entering the port of Alexandria and probably as a memorial to Alexander. The structure was completed under the reign of his son Ptolemy II about 280 B.C..

The structure was built by the en-

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gineer or architect Sostrates of Gnidos. Wishing to ensure that the ages were aware of his engineering feat, Sostrates had inscribed on the wall of the lighthouse; "SOSTRATES OF GNIDOS, TO THE GODS WHO PROTECT THOSE WHO ARE UPON THE SEA". Now, he was realistic enough to realize that Ptolemy II wouldn't allow this pride of authorship to be inscribed on the tower that he, Ptolemy, had commissioned and so the inscription was

The Pharos stood for over 1,600 years

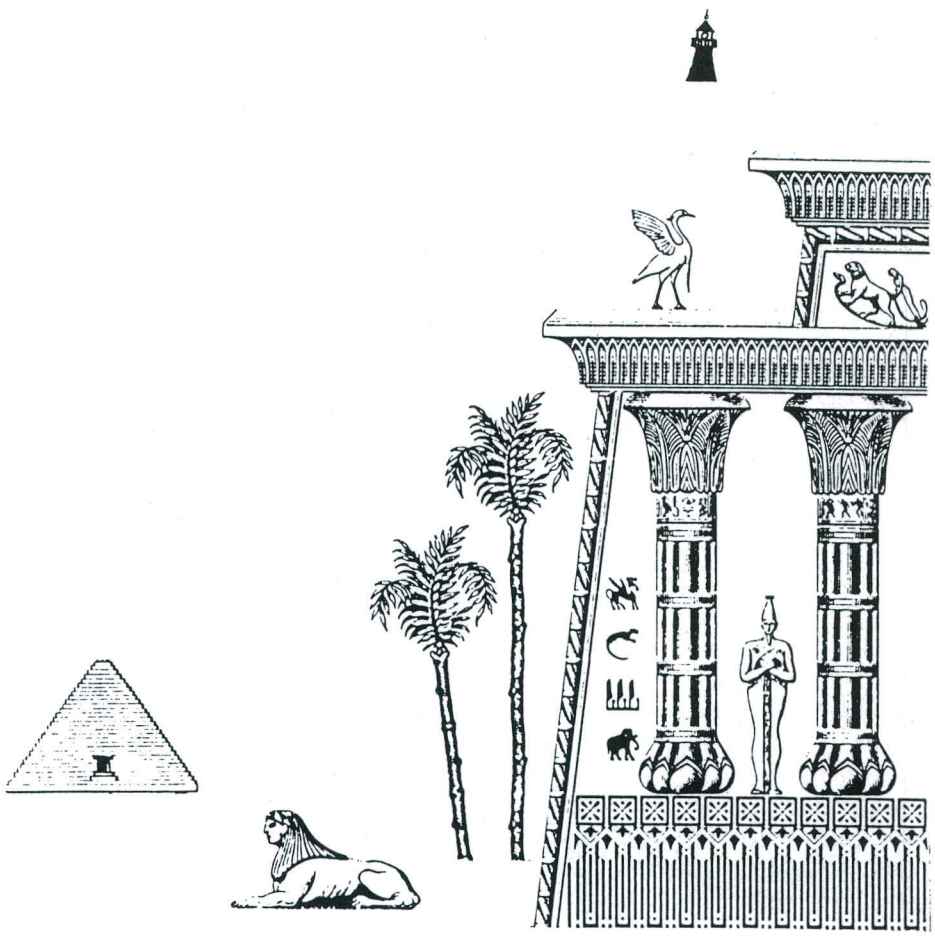
hidden under a layer of realitively soft cement. In the cement was inscribed the name of Ptolemy. Sostrates correctly counted on the passage of time to weather the wall of the lighthouse and expose his message.

Just how tall was this wonder of the ancient world and what did it look like? Well, it stood for 1,600 years, from about 280 B.C. until it was felled by an earthquake around 1,349. It served as a lighthouse until the 800's and many prominent people viewed and commented on the structure during it's long life. The Greek geographer Strabo who visited Egypt in 24 B.C. stated "Pharos is a small, oblong island . . . with a tower upon it of the same name as the island, admirably constructed of white marble, with several stories". Caesar, in 48 A.D. describes the Pharos as a "tower of great height, of wonderful construction". The early Roman historian Pliney (in 77 A.D.) describes the celebrated tower and says, "the purpose of this is to show a fire for the course of ships at night, to forwarn of the shoals at the harbor entrance" and he estimated the tower to be 450 feet high. In the early part of the 12th century, the Arabian geographer stated the tower was 100 brasses high or 600 feet! That it was 420 feet to the middle gallery and 576 to the base of the lantern. He described the tower as being constructed with several set backs which provided a walkway around the tower at each level or set back. He added that it was constructed of excellent quality of building stone, fastened together with molten lead in a manner to form an indestructable mass.

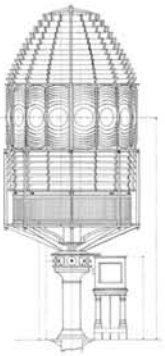
Twentieth century archeologists estimate the tower to have been between 400 and 450 feet tall and if not made of, at least encased in marble. The surrounding and supporting base to have been 400 feet on a side. The base, by the way, also served as a fortification to protect the port of Alexandria. Although the design of the structure is in question, I tend to agree with the opinion that it was constructed in three parts. The base portion being square surrmounted by an octagonal middle section and topped by a cylindrical section. At the top of the tower was an open lantern in which fires were constantly burned, possibly of wood or bales of cotton soaked with a flamable. Can you imagine running up the 450 feet (equal to a 45 story building) to light the fire only to find that you had forgotten the matches?

One early historian related that there were huge mirrors at the top of the lantern which could detect the approach of enemy ships and that the mirrors could be trained, on a sunny day, so that the rays of the sun would incinerate hostle vessels. I don't know about that! Additionally, the light was said to be visible at 100 miles and appear as if it were a star. Again, a little far fetched for me. And, you know, it may not even have been 450 feet high, but I firmly believe that it was very, very tall and deserves to be classed with the wonders of the ancient world.

The Pharos of Alexandria, Egypt, the worlds first and most magnificent lighthouse. A beacon for the ages.



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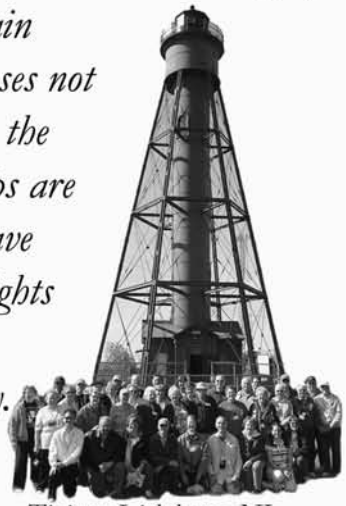
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