



Photo: Sea Isle Historical Museum

Ludlam's Beach Light

Sea Isle City, New Jersey
1885 - 1924

The Ludlam's Beach Lighthouse was built on Ludlam's Beach at 31st street in Sea Isle City New Jersey. It was located approximately 440 feet from the center of Landis Avenue in the present surf line just north of the wood jetty (N39° 09' 42", W74° 41' 05"). Constructed in 1885 near the site of Lifesaving Station Number 33 (presently occupied by the Fun City amusement rides), the lighthouse was originally requested by Charles K. Landis who founded Sea Isle City in 1882. Mr. Landis wanted the government to provide some protection for the vessels that were constantly being wrecked in the area of Townsend's Inlet and Sea Isle City.ⁱ

With \$5000 authorized by an act of Congress July 7, 1884, the United States Light House Board made plans & specifications in December 1884 for a frame lighthouse and keepers dwelling.ⁱⁱ Lots numbered 15 and 16 on the plan of Sea Isle City were selected as the site. The purchase was completed in June of 1885 and proposals were invited for the building of the structure.ⁱⁱⁱ A white frame building with green shutters and lead trim, was built and served as both a lighthouse and as a keeper's dwelling.^{iv}

Joshua H. Reeves, an assistant keeper at Barnegat Light at the northern end of Long Beach Island^v, was appointed as the first keeper of Ludlam's Beach Light on October 20, 1885. His annual salary was \$500^{vi}. On November 3, 1885, Ludlam's Beach Light was lighted for the first time. The site was surrounded with a timber bulkhead, which was filled in with sand and gravel and graded to prevent the wash from high tides.^{vii} There also were two out buildings, an oil shed for storing the lamp oil and a privy at the rear of the building.

The light itself was located 36 feet above high water. It was an oil lamp with a revolving 4th order Fresnel lens that was visible 11-1/2 miles in clear weather.^{viii} When viewed from the sea, the lamp flashed white every 15 seconds. Later, colored glass panels were installed in a segment of the lantern so that if a vessel traveled too close to the sandbar at Townsend's Inlet, the lamp would appear to flash red.^{ix}

In 1888 one end of the back porch was enclosed and made into a summer kitchen. The attic was floored, lined and partitioned into two rooms bringing the house to a total of seven rooms. A brick pavement was laid in the cellar, and the reservation was enclosed with a picket fence.^x

Much damage was done to the Ludlam Beach Lighthouse station by the storm of September 1889, and the danger of its destruction was such that it became necessary to remove the illuminating apparatus and to abandon the lighthouse during the storm. A new wooden sea wall on the oceanfront, with a return of 40 feet on each side had just been completed and was not appreciably hurt. However, the old wall connecting with the new wall and extending around the rear of the site was broken and most of its filling was washed out. Additionally part of the rear and front foundations of the lighthouse and dwelling were undermined. The foundation walls were rebuilt, 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.^{xi}

In 1899, a kitchen addition was erected, new drains and new walks were completed. A flagstaff was erected and a telephone was installed. A complete set of signal flags was furnished to the site.^{xii} In 1900 a 156-foot long concrete sea wall around the rear of the lighthouse lot was constructed.^{xiii}

From 1900 to 1923 little is recorded about the lighthouse station at Ludlam Beach other than the continuous repairs needed due to the constant battle with the sea. One noteworthy item reported in 1907 was the installation of city water in the lighthouse^{xiv}. In 1912 the illuminating apparatus of Ludlam's Beach Light was changed from an oil wick lamp to an incandescent oil vapor lamp.^{xv}

On the evening of November 21, 1923, an unattended kerosene lamp on the kitchen table was knocked over by the keeper's pet. At midnight the keeper rose to check on the light and found the kitchen engulfed in flames. With the aid of Coast Guard personnel from the nearby lifesaving station and local firefighters, the blaze was extinguished, but not before seriously damaging the kitchen, and about one third of the building's roof. Since the lens and the lantern were only slightly damaged, temporary repairs were made, including a canvas cover over the roof, and the light continued in operation throughout the winter. On March 11, 1924, a storm tore away the temporary repairs to the roof making further occupancy impossible.^{xvi}

Rather than make repairs, the government erected a 40-foot high steel tower with a gas lamp to replace the lighthouse. Captain Hardwick, the last lightkeeper, was transferred from the Ludlam Beach Lighthouse to the Absecon Lighthouse at the north end of Atlantic City.^{xvii} The steel tower was located slightly north of the lighthouse and operated until the storm of March 7, 1962.^{xviii}

Just after the tower was constructed, the old lighthouse, then one of the oldest buildings on the island, was moved from the surf line up the beach to the corner of 31st Street and Landis Avenue. In the early 1940s it was moved again to the northwest corner of 35th Street and Landis. The old lighthouse building was jacked up to become the second floor of a private residence where it survives to this day.

Following the 1962 storm, the steel tower was dismantled as ships now relied on radio navigation and satellite positioning systems.

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References:

- ⁱ Seven Mile Beach Reporter news item (? 1924).
- ⁱⁱ 1885 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury
also Letter, Mr. Robert G. Bachand to Ms. Harriett A. Reardon Bailey, August 29, 1987.
- ⁱⁱⁱ 1885 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{iv} Northeast Lights, Robert G. Bachland, 1989, p371, 372.
- ^v Sentinels of the Shore, Bill Gately, 1998, p46.
- ^{vi} Letter, Mr. Robert G. Bachand to Ms. Harriett A. Reardon Bailey, August 29, 1987.
- ^{vii} 1886 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{viii} Memories of Days Gone By in Sea Isle City, Sea Isle City Historical Society, May 1990, p20.
- ^{ix} Seven Mile Beach Reporter news item (? 1924).
- ^x 1888 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{xi} 1890 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{xii} 1899 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{xiii} 1900 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of the Treasury.
- ^{xiv} 1907 Annual Report of the Light House Board to the Secretary of Commerce.
- ^{xv} 1912 Annual Report of the Light House Bureau to the Secretary of Commerce.
- ^{xvi} Northeast Lights, Robert G. Bachland, 1989, p371, 372.
- ^{xvii} Seven Mile Beach Reporter news item (? 1924).
- ^{xviii} Memories of Days Gone By in Sea Isle City, Sea Isle City Historical Society, May 1990,
p20.

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