

## *Some history of the Middle Island Light Station*

Middle Island Light Station is located in Lake Huron, approximately halfway between Thunder Bay Island and Presque Isle Harbor, Michigan. The island lies about 2 ½ miles offshore of Rockport Harbor. There are seven buildings on the island, including a light tower, Keepers Quarters, an Oil House, Tool Garage, a Fog Horn building and two brick privies which are being restored by Middle Island Lighthouse Keeper's Association. The conical brick tower stands 77 feet tall. The Lighthouse is white with a red band in the middle. Its light is 78 feet above low water and can be seen for 17 miles.

As lighthouses go, Middle Island Light is "new," entering service in 1905. However, its important role to mariners traversing the shoals that surround the course between Thunder Bay and Presque Isle on Lake Huron cannot be overstated.

The sentinel gets its name because the island is midway between these northern Michigan landmarks. The island had long represented a "triple-edged sword" to mariners. Marking a turning point in the course for vessels making up and down the coast, the island's lee side also represented an excellent harbor of refuge in which to escape Huron's fury. However surrounded with shoals with depths of less than six feet on all but its northeast side, the refuge could be hard to find in dark of night or in the thickest weather. In fact, the area was considered dangerous enough that the Life Saving Service built a station on the island in 1881 to help service ships in distress in the area.

Plans and recommendations for the lighthouse began in 1896, but appropriations were slow in coming. Congress finally approved an appropriation in 1902, and construction began on the outbuildings, keeper's dwelling and finally the tower. You can find many of the original plans and cost details listed on record (and with our island history packet located on Middle Island).

Built of unpainted buff brick, the 70-ft. tower stood on a slight rise that provided its fourth order Fresnel lens with a focal plane of 78 feet. It was officially illuminated on June 1, 1905. By 1928, the lens had been upgraded to a third order Fresnel and the fog signal upgraded with the installation of a compressed air-powered diaphone system.

When the Coast Guard assumed responsibility in 1939, the tower was painted white with a horizontal black band in the center. Sometime later, the band was painted red, as seen today.

Following automation in late 1961 and the removal of keepers, vandals took their toll on the tower and outbuildings over the years. A group of concerned citizens in the Alpena area formed the Middle Island Lighthouse Keepers Association (M.I.L.K.A.) in 1992 with the goal of restoring and preserving the structures for future generations.

The fog signal building was Marv Theut's first effort to convert major structures into lodging. Marv Theut is the founder of M.I.L.K.A.. It became the Middle Island Keepers' Lodge, which opened for business in 2003. Although operated privately, it still ensures a future for this historic site. Lodge managing owner, Captain Mike Theut volunteers many hours per year bringing materials to the island and performing maintenance on the structures and grounds. So, by staying the night at Middle Island's Keepers' Lodge, you help make it possible for others to enjoy the historic buildings as well.

Hoi Ra: Abou Conta Ma Spec Pho Lin Testim