

*A sentinel for seamen:*

# The Lighthouse at Point Abino

**By Clare Allen**

SINCE 1917 when it first lanced a beam of light through the darkness of night, the lighthouse at Point Abino, Ont., has been a major guide for mariners on the eastern end of Lake Erie. It would be impossible to calculate the number of lake freighters, ocean-going ships and pleasure boats that have sailed past this friendly beacon bound for Buffalo or up the lakes. However, an estimated average of 2,400 cargo vessels pass the light during the normal shipping season, April 1 to Dec. 20.

The beacon was built and is maintained by the Canadian Department of Transport, Marine Services. The present lighthouse keeper is Lewis W. Anderson, who with his wife Helen and sons, Warren, 17 years old, and Kenneth, 9, live in a neat home near the base of the light.

Abino Light, according to Anderson, serves a dual purpose. It warns skippers of a long, rocky reef which extends out into Lake Erie from the point. Also being situated about midway (9½ miles) between the lighthouses at Port Colborne and Buffalo, it provides an accurate reference point for navigating this portion of the lake.

THE BIG LIGHT, mounted inside a glass enclosure 120 feet above ground, can be seen a maximum of

20 miles and is visible from all points approached by water. The light source is a single, 15,000-watt electric bulb, which, when magnified by hundreds of sparkling glass prisms, has an intensity of 450,000 candle power.

Each lighthouse has a special sequence of flashes and periods of darkness to distinguish it from others and this code is noted on navigation charts of the area. The Point Abino light sequence is: 1 dull flash, 1 bright flash, 1 dull, followed by a period of darkness of 12 seconds duration. The sequence is then repeated.

The rotating light, its prisms and the steel frame on which they are mounted weigh 1½ tons and float in a container filled with mercury. This provides an almost friction-free bearing for the light assembly and maintains it in a perpendicular position at all times.

ABINO LIGHTHOUSE is also equipped with a diaphone or foghorn which is operated when rain, snow, or fog reduces visibility on the lake. It too has a code which consists of a 2-second blast, then 3 seconds of silence repeated three times and followed by a 43-second period of silence.

Anderson says neither the light nor the diaphone have ever failed and every precaution is taken to insure their

operation. In the building at the base of the lighthouse there is a Diesel engine coupled to a generator which can provide electricity for the light should there be a failure of regular power. There's also an engine using natural gas for fuel (a rarity these days), which can drive a compressor to provide the huge volume of air required for the foghorn.

The keeper is on duty 24 hours a day during the months the light is in service and there's plenty of work connected with the job. The buildings are immaculately maintained by Anderson and son Warren, who is acting assistant keeper during the summer months. All equipment is checked every day to make sure it is operable. The huge lenses of the light are cleaned and polished twice a week; machinery must be adjusted, greased and oiled and there's always sweeping and painting to be done.

BUT THE duties of a lighthouse keeper extend beyond the maintenance of his light and fog horn. In stormy weather he keeps watch over the lake for vessels in distress and must be prepared to assist in rescue operations. One such incident occurred on June 21 of this year and Anderson was ready when the emergency arose.

It was nearly dark, there was a storm, and Anderson was in the lighthouse scanning the wind-tossed lake. A

*During a shipping season,  
Point Abino Light guides  
2,400 cargo vessels past  
the point's rocky reef.*

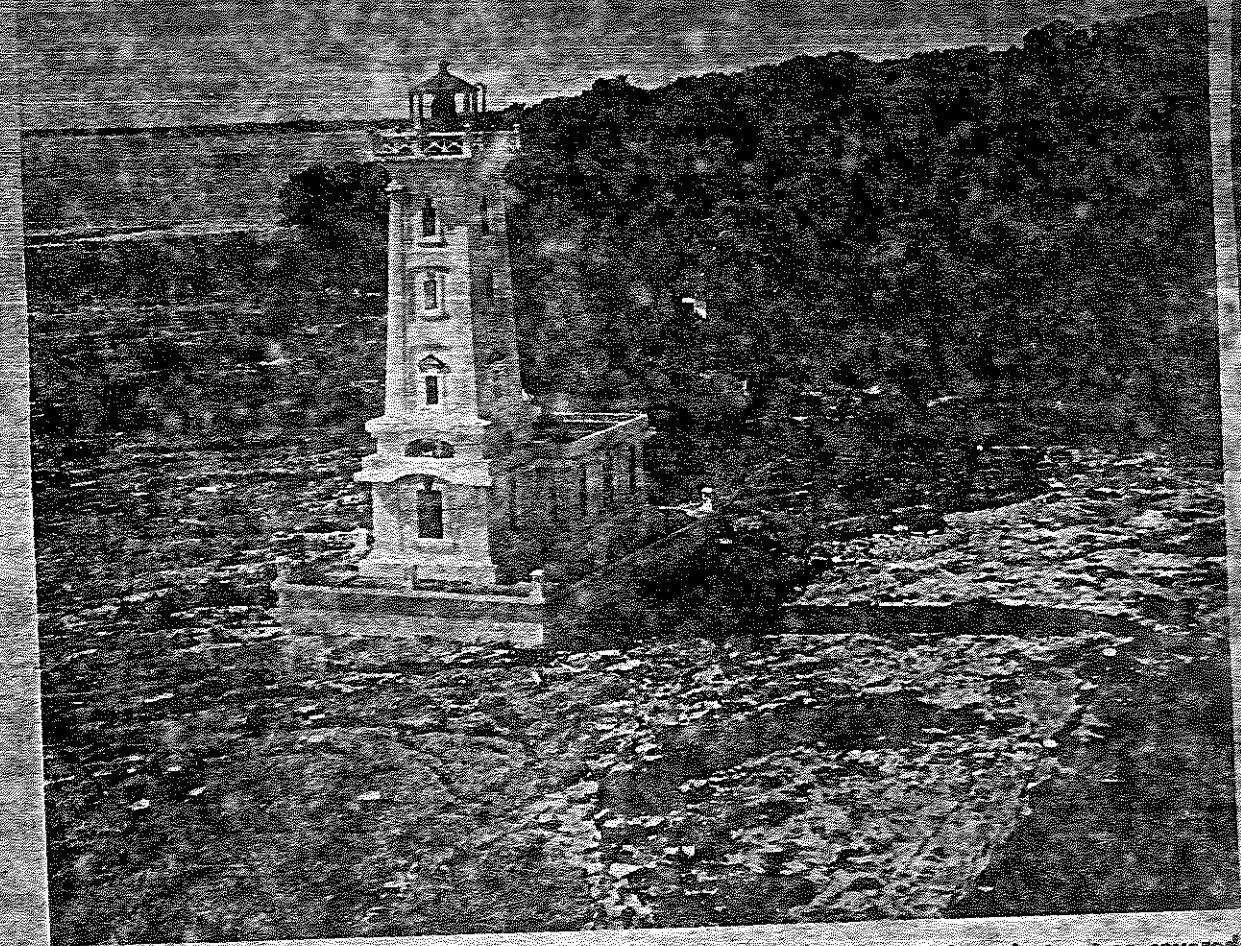
salboat came into view about 500 yards off shore, taking a severe buffeting from the weather. Then, as he peered through the gloom, the lighthouse keeper saw the boat capsize, throwing its two occupants into the water.

Knowing it was impossible to launch his own small skiff in the surf pounding the rocky shore, Anderson dashed to the telephone and called the Buffalo Canoe Club, a short distance away on Abino Bay. Members there got aboard the club's cruiser and headed for the overturned boat.

**M**EANWHILE, Anderson climbed to the top of the lighthouse and stopped the mechanism which rotates the big light. Then, slowly and carefully he turned it by hand until its bright beam was focused on the men clinging to the boat. The rescuers had no trouble finding the craft and hauling the men to safety, thanks to the prompt action of Anderson.

The Abino lighthouse is open to the public from 1 to 7 p.m. and so far this season more than 600 persons have toured the facility. This means many extra trips up and down the steep steps and ladders for the keeper and his boys but they enjoy escorting visitors and explaining the working of the light and foghorn. Most visitors agree the experience is worth the time and effort. So does Anderson for he's proud of his light and the government service for which he works.

*(Photos by Paul Kassay)*



Built on solid rock, the Point Abino lighthouse stands out in sharp relief against a tree covered background. This view toward the northwest is from a low-flying plane.