Ports and Portholes

September-October 2026

Lighthouse Listings

Winter view of White Shoal Lighthouse. By PFC Jeff Hall, USCG

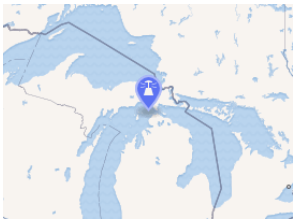
In this issue…

- The White Shoal Lighthouse and the Maritime Museum Scrapbook
- The Lightkeeper's Son by Joe Cook
- Merchant Marine Memories
- Winter Rescue and Search Team to Hasten Emergency Response Time

Researcher, Writer, and Editor: kathywarnes@gmail.com

The White Shoal Lighthouse, Straits of Mackinac, Michigan: The Barber Pole Lighthouse

The Tallest Lighthouse on the Great Lakes



Up Close and Personal

Home: Lake Michigan, twenty miles west of Mackinac Bridge in the Straits of Mackinac.

The tallest lighthouse in the Great Lakes is the White Shoal Light, which stands 143 feet tall from the base to the top. It is the tallest lighthouse on the Great Lakes.

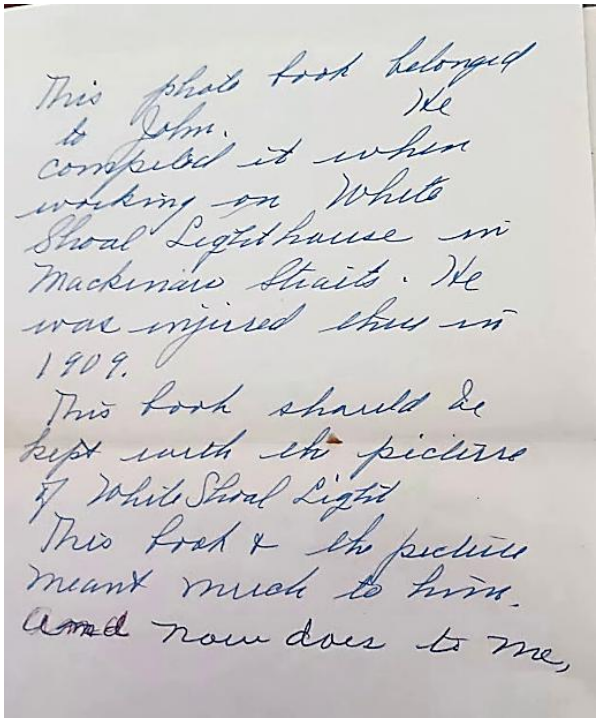
Key Facts About White Shoal Light

Location: It sits in Lake Michigan, twenty miles west of the Mackinac Bridge.

Design: It features a unique red-and-white spiral candy-stripe pattern.

Structure: The offshore tower includes eleven decks and 5,200 square feet of interior space.

From a Scrapbook in the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum


This book belonged to John. He compiled it when working on White Shoal Lighthouse in Mackinaw Straits. He was injured there in 1909.
This book should be kept with the pictures of White Shoal Light
This book & the pictures meant much to him. and now does to me,

Found on the shelves of the Great Lakes Room in the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation: A vintage scrapbook filled with pictures mostly of the construction of the White Shoal Lighthouse in the Straits of Mackinac in Michigan. Museum and maritime people do not usually spend a lot of time looking for interesting historical connections, but they are there for researching. The note under the album cover is the tell-tale smoking lamp.

The Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum, the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the White Shoal Light Historical Preservation Society based in Traverse City, Michigan, with additional operations and boat works connected to the City of Cheboygan, Michigan, and John Johnson of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin are connected with historical threads as strong as the oak posts that have held the White Shoal Lighthouse in place for 116 years. And Jim Woodward, who operates his specialty firm, The Lighthouse Consultant LLC, also belongs on the list. The White Shoal Lighthouse is the main character in this story of connections that spread beyond the boundaries of its isolated location in the open waters of the Staits of Mackinac about twenty miles west of the Mackinac Bridge.

White Shoal Up Close and Personal: John Johnson's Island World

The Straits of Mackinac has a justly earned reputation of being dangerous and challenging to navigate, with the challenges and dangers coming from conditions of topography, traffic, and temperamental weather. Water depths in the Straits change from bathtub to bathyscape level in a wavelength and currents from both Lake Michigan and Lake Huron play tag and weave in and out of each other's spaces, sometimes clashing and crashing. Wind, waves, ice and fog stalk the narrow Straits in turn and sometimes together with changing patterns and impacts.

White Shoal, twenty miles west of the Mackinac Bridge, is one of the symbols of the complex nature of the Straits, extending in an east-west direction for nearly two miles. Parts of its western end peer above the surface of the water and just five feet of water cover other parts of it. White Shoal has other shallows and reefs for neighbors, including Simmons Reef in the northwest and Grays Reef to the south. White Shoal is located about twenty-two miles from the nearest harbor and seven miles from the closest uninhabited land.

The United States Government Navigators

Navigators who traveled the Straits in canoes, French voyageurs and English fur traders, immigrants seeking new homes- all had to navigate the treacherous straits with common sense, skill, and luck until Light Ships and government organizations gradually appeared as assistants. In 1789, the U.S. Treasury Department oversaw the United States Lighthouse Establishment. In August 1852, the United States Congress established the Lighthouse Board to improve navigational aids and by October 9, 1852, its official organization had taken place. Congress dissolved the Lighthouse Board on July 1, 1910, replacing it with a civilian agency, the Bureau of Lighthouses. In the beginning, the Bureau of Lighthouses operated under the United States Department of Treasury, later transferring to the Commerce Department in 1903. From 1910 until 1939, the Bureau of Lighthouses administered the nation's maritime aids to navigation. Commonly called the U.S. Lighthouse Service, the new agency operated until it merged into the modern United States Coast Guard in 1939.

The Navigators

Light Vessel 56 and the Warrington

Lightship LV-56 marked the treacherous Lake Michigan waters around White Shoal before White Shoal Lighthouse had been built to guide mariners safely past it. For the nineteen years between October 1891 and 1910, LV 56 helped mariners avoid the roiling waters around the shoal and the Warrington, the primary Eleventh District Coast Guard tender resupplied the lightship. It was the only lightship to patrol the White Shoal waters until the lighthouse tender Warrington towed it to its new assignment at the North Manitou Shoal Light.

The White Shoal Light Challenge

. The White Shoal Light was the culmination of a 40-year effort from 1870 to 1910, when engineers began to build lights on isolated islands, reefs, and shoals that were significant navigational hazards.

On March 4, 1907, Congress appropriated $250,000 for a light and fog signal to replace lightship LV-56 serving at White Shoal. The U.S. Lighthouse Board initiated the plans and preparations for the White Shoal Light before Congress officially created the Bureau of Lighthouses in June 1910. By 1910, there were 11,713 navigational aids of all types in the United States—this included 1,397 major lighthouses. The Lighthouse Board authorized the construction and supervision of the work on the White Shoal Lighthouse, beginning in 1908. The transition from

the old Lighthouse Board to the newly established Bureau of Lighthouses happened right around the time the tower was completed in the summer of 1910, when the old Lighthouse Board transitioned to the newly established Bureau of Lighthouses.

Building the White Shoal Lighthouse took massive amounts of courage, material, and weather watching. Isolation, no land mass nearby, no natural site for a dock and the changing weather were just a few of the obstacles facing the crew confronted with the task of building a lighthouse from the underwater shoal to the tower tall enough to light mariners away from the dangerous shoal. Since there was no nearby land available, construction crews had to build a 72-foot square timber crib on shore at St. Ignace and float it twenty miles on the open lake. Before the lighthouse could be built and brought to White Shoal, the workers had to level the shoal's bedrock underwater using 4,000 tons of rock and 3,700 cubic yards of concrete that would withstand the lake's waves and winter ice flows.

After completing the timber crib, they had to sink it precisely onto the underwater shoal. There was no natural harbor or no dock at the shoal, making it difficult for workers to tie up boats and dangerous to leave boats resting against the crib. Sudden weather changes chased workers away, creating a crew of weather watchers and races and sprints against the winds and waves. The lantern room and final lighting fixtures were set in place during the navigation season of 1910. In August 1910, Thomas H. Miller, the Eleventh District *Lampist*. arrived at White Shoal Light to supervise the delicate task of assembling the lighting components. The task included floating a massive, French-made Second Order bivalve Fresnel lens in a trough of low-friction mercury and hooking it up to a weight-driven clockwork rotation machine. By September 1, 1910, the lighthouse blossomed into a 1.2 million candlepower beam that could be seen as far as twenty-eight miles away.

One of the original photos of the White Shoal Lighthouse, which is famous today for its red and white candy cane spiral stripes. It looked completely different in September 1910, when it was officially lit. Workers painted the terracotta brick tower entirely white as shown in the photograph. The famous candy cane stripes moving up the tower like a spiral staircase were not painted on the lighthouse until 1954.

White Shoal Lighthouse Pictures

White Shoal Lighthouse Straits o

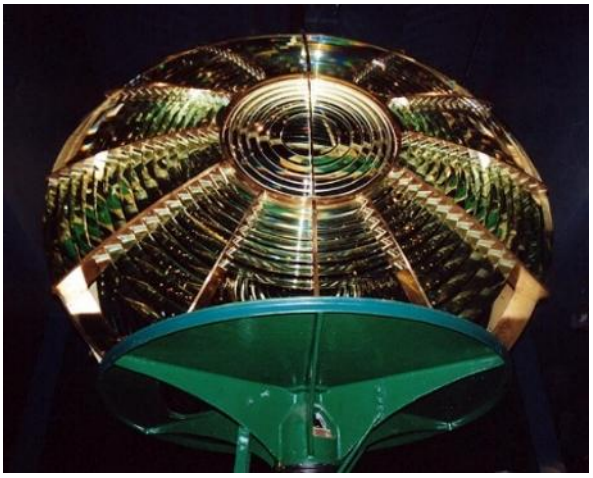
https://onwardoctagonohiohistory.blog/

Posing at the Door

This historic 1909 photograph shows the crew of brick masons posing outside the lighthouse's boathouse door. After the heavy steel superstructure of the lighthouse was riveted together, this team was brought out to Lake Michigan to line the steel tower with rows of bricks. During the summer of 1909, the entire crew lived together in a tight, temporary two-story wooden shack built right on the west corner of the construction crib deck.

Learning the Lenses

White Shoal Bivalve Second Order Fresnel lens on display at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum. Copyright photograph by Terry Pepper, September 1999



In 1923, the U:S. Lighthouse Service introduced automation by using acetylene powered automatic lamp changers. When the U.S. Coast Guard absorbed the lighthouse Service in 1939, it continued the shift to automatic systems. This policy also signaled that lighthouse keepers would gradually become as obsolete as primitive lighting technology. By the mid-1960s, the Coast Guard introduced the Lighthouse Automation and Modernization Program designed to replace human keepers with remote technology and by 1990 nearly all lighthouses across the United States were fully automated. In 1998, Boston Light became the final American lighthouse to be automated, ending 215 years of manned lighthouse service.

The White Shoal Lighthouse and the Ashtabula Lighthouse are partners in the sense that the same lampist, Jim Woodward, restored their Fresnel lenses when the Coast Guard automated their lights. Cleveland resident Jim Woodward is one of only four men in the United States who can correctly be called lampists, craftsmen who are qualified to repair and restore the classical Fresnel lighthouse lenses. He served an apprenticeship under a Coast Guard lampist in the 1960s and enhanced his skills with some of his own restoration methods.

Workers removed the White Shoal Light's immense second-order bivalve Fresnel lens in 1984, and it has been displayed at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum about fifty-two miles away at Whitefish Point in Paradise, Michigan since 1987. The smaller fourth-order Fresnel lens in the Ashtabula Harbor Light is exhibited at the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum a look out of the window away. A story about Jim Woodward illustrating his specialized traditional methods and documenting his work on the White Shoal Lighthouse and Ashtabula Lighthouse Fresnel lenses appeared in the Lighthouse Digest.

The foundation of the lighthouse sits on a 72-foot-square timber crib built from 12-inch-thick white oak beams shipped from Oregon.

In 1908, the wooden framework was assembled like a giant log cabin on the shore of St. Ignace, Michigan. It was then towed out into the lake, centered over the shoal, and systematically filled with roughly 4,000 tons of rock (visible being dumped by the crane bucket in the photo) to sink it securely onto the lake floor.

Once resting on the bottom, a heavy concrete deck was poured over the stone-filled crib to serve as the stable base for the tower, which went into service in September 1910.

June 29, 1909- A Tragic Day in the Life of John Johnson

Historical documentation from the construction of the White Shoal Light Station confirms that the Reid Wrecking Company's celebrated wrecker Ottawa was specifically hired to assist Milwaukee's Gillen Construction Company fleet on-site due to its immense size and heavy-lifting salvage capabilities. The details of the operations shown in the photo include: The White Shoal Crib. The large wooden structure visible on the right side of the photo is the 72' x 72' massive wooden foundation crib. It was built onshore in St. Ignace, Michigan, towed out into Lake Michigan, and sunk into place atop the shoal in July 1908. The vessel in the center foreground alongside the cranes and work barges is a steam-powered tug and supply tender Ottawa utilized by the Gillen Construction Company, the contractor tasked with building the foundation and filling it with thousands of tons of stone and concrete. Once this foundation pier was completed, the iconic 121-foot "barber pole" lighthouse was erected on top of it, officially opening on September 1, 1910.

Major Judson and Assistant Inspector John Johnson

Major William V. Judson of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers supervised both the design and construction of the White Shoal Light project for the Ninth Michigan District. Instead of designating a title as Chief Inspector, the Lighthouse Board appointed District Engineers to act as the main directors and overseers for major offshore engineering projects.

John Johnson's title as assistant inspector made him responsible for supervising construction activities and setting heavy materials. His responsibilities included on-site engineering supervision, monitoring structural safety, and managing the laborers who built the massive concrete and timber crib foundations. The U.S. Lighthouse Board followed strict, standardized civil service and professional rules for selecting civilians to work as field personnel that John Johnson would have had to meet. Core qualifications included Heavy Construction and Mechanical Experience which indicated a proven background in structural trades like heavy masonry, concrete engineering, or carpentry and the strong mechanical skills to operate steam-mixers, hoisting machinery, and derrick equipment that would be used on the shoal. Since the White Shoal project unfolded miles out in Lake Michigan, assistant inspectors were expected to have experience handling boats, skillfully manage logistics between the shoreline staging grounds at St. Ignace and the construction site on open water.

Assistant Inspectors like John Johnson had to be the onsite stand in for District Engineers like Major William V. Judson. They had to be highly capable of reading complicated engineering blueprints, keeping precise written accounts of materials like cement, stone, and iron, and drafting formal progressive reports. The U.S. Lighthouse Service required every applicant to pass a rigorous physical examination, proving that they could perform intense manual labor under dangerous offshore conditions and be physical capable of swimming if a maritime emergency occurred. John Johnson met all these requirements to earn his title of assistant inspector.

June 29, 1909- A Tragic Day in the Life of John Johnson

During the 1909 construction season, workers were building the superstructure atop a massive 72-foot square underwater timber crib. The machinery involved included the Lifting Derrick/Mast which was a heavy wood or steel crane system utilized to swing large structural parts, steel framing, and iron plates into place from delivery barges. The machinery also included steam hoisting engines, which were high powered winch systems driven by steam boilers. These systems utilized thick steel cables and rigging to raise and lower heavy components onto the concrete pier.

As Assistant Inspector John Johnson assisted in setting a 60-foot structural steel column on the second floor of the lighthouse, a shackle broke, causing the gigantic steel column weighting 9,000 pounds to fall directly on him. John Johnson suffered severe, debilitating crushing injuries from the accident. He suffered crushing injuries and a severely broken backbone, although his spinal cord remained intact which spared him from being permanently and fully paralyzed.

The logistics of transporting him to the hospital from the White Shoal site were daunting. The U.S. Lighthouse Service used specialized ships called lighthouse tenders to construct White Shoal Light. During the 1909 construction season, the primary tender assigned to the Ninth District (which included Lake Michigan) was the USLHT *Marigold*. Additionally, the Gillen Construction Company (the contracted firm building the foundation) utilized their own fleet of steam tugboats and stone barges to move men and materials between the shoal and the mainland. Johnson would have been evacuated on one of these active fleet vessels to the nearest rail-connected port—most likely Straits of Mackinac / St. Ignace or Cheboygan.

His crew would have lowered or carried him down from the lighthouse pier to a waiting transport boat or lighthouse tender which would carry him across the lake to the nearest mainland port connections. Mackinaw City was the nearest mainland port connection to catch a train to Detroit and the Detroit Marine Hospital. The Michigan Central Railroad operated a direct line known as the Mackinaw Division which cut a straight line through the center of the Lower Peninsula. depot sat next to the ferry docks in Mackinaw City, A patient like John Johnson could be carried off a boat and placed straight onto a southbound passenger coach to make the 300-mile journey.

In 1910, the Michigan Central train would have arrived at the Michigan Central Passenger Station at Third and West Jefferson Avenue near the Detroit River front. From there, John Johnson would have been taken to the Detroit Marine Hospital to receive specialized care. The Marine Hospital sat right next to the docks where lighthouse tenders and supply ships were loaded. It served as the primary medical destination for any official personnel serving the U.S. Lighthouse District in Michigan.

According to the reports of his accident and the Congressional Record John's injuries were serious and debilitating. The Congressional Record reports his injuries from official Coast Guard and medical testimony. (The slides will automatically advance. They are set a little longer than usual because they take time to read.).

Congressional Record of Accident a

https://onwardoctagonohiohistory.blog/

John Johnson Struggles His Way Back to Walking

The official congressional papers filed his relief bill heavily focused on the permanent nature of John's injuries to help him receive compensation, but the Sturgeon Bay Advocate focused more on the recovery side. Seven months after John Johnson's June 29, 1909, accident, the Sturgeon Bay Advocate of January 27, 1910, noted a visit from John Johnson in their offices.

"John Johnson of Washinton Island was among Advocate callers one day last week. He is the young man who was so severely injured while assisting in the building of the light house on White Shoal Reef, foot of Lake Michigan last summer and it is not so long since he has been discharged from hospital in Detroit where he was conveyed immediately afterward. He was quite recovered, which is quite remarkable because his backbone was fractured but the spine was left intact.

After spending some little time with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Magnus Johnson, John will return to this city and assist in the work of rebuilding the White Shoal Light Ship which was brought here just before the end of navigation last fall. "

Instead of returning to his position as assistant inspector on the offshore crib structure of the White Shoal Light, a role he could no longer physically fill, John Johnson used his experience with the White Shoal project to work on supporting vessels in a sheltered harbor instead of wrestling with heavy steel pipes on a wave buffeted reef. John Johnson went to work at the Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin shipyard of Rieboldt & Wolter Shipyard. During the early 1900s, Rieboldt & Wolter held the leading government contracts for wintering, repairing, and modifying federal vessels including region lightshipsv2assigned to local waters of Lake Michigan and Green Bay.

Lightships were brought into protected harbors or shipyards like Riebolt & Wolter for workers like John Johnson to repair and retrofit them so they could return to service. John may have even worked on LV 56 so it could be the active floating guard for white shoal while crews finished the White Shoal Lighthouse on the reef.

John Johnson's Survival as an Ex-Assistant Inspector

In the early 1900s, there were not many options for long-term care and financial survival. The Jones Act of 1920 and the Longshore and Harbor Worker's Compensation Act of 1927 were decades in the future. When a maritime or lighthouse worker were severely injured, their survival and ability to earn a living depended on minimal federal medical systems, solid community support, and tightly focused legal solutions.

John Johnson's compensation from the Light House Board was not a long-term benefit. The Act for the Relief of Sick and Disabled Seamen in 1798 provided for John Johnson's care at the Detroit Marine Hospital, but the hospital provided only temporary medical treatment and rehabilitation. When John Johnson left the hospital, his benefits stopped.

Nothing resembling universal Worker's Compensation existed in John's time. State level workers' plans were just beginning and the plans that existed excluded maritime workers because of foggy legal jurisdiction over navigable waters.

Military veterans qualified for invalid pensions, but civilian employees under the jurisdiction of the Lighthouse Board or private shipping companies could not claim a disability pension. If a worker could no longer perform manual labor, their government or corporate paychecks stopped.

Without formal safety nets, families and local communities had to shoulder the burden of long-term care for disabled workers. Injured workers like John Johnson moved back to parental or other sheltering homes, relying on family networks for survival.

Communities like Sturgeon Bay and Washington Island banded together to help disabled residents. Neighbors frequently organized local benefits, church fundraisers or community drives to help survivors and families of industrial accidents. Local businesses sometimes would find lighter work for disabled men as they did for John Johnson.

The legal path for workers seeking financial compensation proved to be uncertain and full of twists and turns. The common law of the early 1900s held that if a co-worker or fellow servant caused the injury, the employer was usually completely shielded from liability.

In rare cases, federal workers or contractors petitioned their local representatives to introduce a private relief bill in Congress. If Congress passed the bill, the worker would receive a one-time lump sum payout for a specific injury from the Federal Treasury. This course of action took years and required great personal leverage. John Johnson chose to go home and his family and community welcome him.

John Johnson, 1874-1941

John Johnson is buried in his family plot in Washington Island Town Cemetery, Door County, Wisconsin.

John Johnson.pdf

During his time working on the White Shoal Lighthouse construction and dealing with the impact his time there had on the rest of his life, John Johnson took time to compile a scrapbook. Whoever preserved it and how it ended up in the Ashtabula Maritime Museum is a historical mystery that may never be solved. But the person who wrote the mysterious handwritten note and tucked it in front of his scrapbook can rest assured that it will stay with the pictures of the White Shoal Light where he worked so diligently and sacrificed so much.

Featured Footnotes.pptx

https://onwardoctagonohiohistory.blog/

The Lightkeeper's Son

By

Joe Cook

The Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum when it was the lightkeeper's residence and Lightkeeper John Brophy lived there with his family from 1932-1937. Joe was friends with Jere Brophy, and he recalled Jere with keen and fond memories.

When Joe wrote his memoir, the Lighthouse Keeper's Son, in 1986, he used terms that pertained to the Harbor area in bygone days. He defined Point Kids as the boys who grew up at or near the eastern end of Walnut Boulevard where Point Park is located. The Bank was the area down over the hill behind the Marine Museum, which area no longer exists, but is covered by huge piles of coal. The Slip is the area of the dock space at the western end of the docks which were accessible in years past, but now also hold piles of coal. His reminiscence appeared in the June 1986 Harbor Journal.

Although Jere was perhaps four years older than we Point Kids of that era, consisting of Paul Heagerty, Johnny Kapsanis, Ray Moser, Lee Nelson and myself, Jere was always willing to have us around him. A W.C. Fields he was not, for he never said, "Get away boys, you bother me.' He seemed to welcome our being around us and it was a great adventure to be with Jere.

My family and I lived several houses west of the lighthouse keeper's house. My bedroom was upstairs in the back, overlooking Lake Erie. At night, the light from the lighthouse would flash through my window.

On foggy nights or in rainy weather, the foghorn would wound. I could hear it through my window. Not only the foghorn itself, but also the sound of the engines working the generators that powered the massive foghorn. So, I would hear BEE-COO, BEE COO, pump, pump, pump, pump, pump and so on and so forth. I could see the lights of the freighters as they made their way up and down Lake Erie. It was peaceful and safe. Jere's dad was on duty, and all was well at the Harbor.

I do not know how Jere put up with us Point Kids. What patience! What understand! Our mothers never questioned us about being with Jere. Whenever my mother would ask where I was or where I was going, if I were going to Jere's I would respond, "Jere's." And all was well.

Jere had a very inventive, creative, intelligent mind. And because he seemed involved in quite a few projects that we shared in, we were able to see at first-hand how a person can get an idea and carry it on to the finish.

One summer, Jere decided to build a rowboat. He drew up his plans, got the lumber and fittings, and built that boat from scratch, not from a kit, right there in the garage. He cut the lumber, planed it down to the right thickness and shape, laid it in place, fastened it down, caulked it, and painted the boat. And, with a set of oars we set out with him on the maiden voyage down over The Bank along the Slip. The boat was perfect from the moment it was placed in the water. Not a leak to be found.

Another time, Jere had the idea that he would like to make a "deep sea diving: outfit. Again, he drew up the plans and set about making it. Of course, we kids were right there at his elbows, "helping" him. He took an old water heater tank and cut it down. He shaped it, put in a water-proof window and the necessary pipes and valves. He padded the part that rested on the shoulders. Then he took his mother's muffin tins and proceeded to make the lead weights which he bolted on to a heavy, strong leather belt. This was to be used to hold the diver under water.

Then, somehow, Jere took an old tire air pump and fixed it in such a way that air would be pumped out through the hose by both the down and the up-pumping actions. Thus, when the pump was fastened by a long garden hose to the diving helmet, air could be continuously pumped down to the diver under the water.

When the “deep sea diving” outfit was finished, Jere took us down to The Slip where the outfit was tested out on that mysterious sunken ship at The Slip.

Jere was into amateur radio at a noticeably young age. Long before the age of short-wave radio kits, around 1936, Jere decided to make his own “home brew” short-wave radio. And he did! And it worked! Just after dark we would go to Jere’s house up in the attic where Jere had his rig set up and working. I recall it being by a window at the top of the stairs. We could look out the window at Lake Erie. It was something special. He had hung his long antenna, and we could see it stretching out there and then the wire coming in and screwed to his set. Then Jere would begin: “W8QKI W8QKI” W8 Quebec, K-Kentucky, I-Indiana, calling any 50-meter phone. W8QKI on the stern and rockbound coast of Lake Erie calling CQ,CQ, CQ,. Calling CQ. Come in CQ.”

And then we would listen very intently as Jere switched the dials and listened for a fellow ham operator to come in. And then, through the static we would hear, “This is so and so calling W8QKI from and then he would mention where his signal was from. Sometimes the signal would be from down south, the Midwest, near, far. We always hoped for Europe or South America, but who cared. Someone answered Jere’s signal!

There were times when we would go to Jere’s and no one responded to his calls. We were disappointed, but Jere explained it was weather conditions. At times, Jere would change the cell on the set to get greater or closer distance. These various cells wound by hand to certain specifications, were all made by Jere. Wow!

Jere W. Brophy graduated from Harbor High School in the Class of 1937. After graduation, he entered the General Electric Apprenticeship Program. He then entered Ohio State University where he completed four years of study in two and one-half years because he: wanted “to get on with his life.” In 1989, he was the director of planning in Tracor Corporation, covering financial

analysis, market planning, strategic planning, business plans and strategies, product plans between divisions, new revenue generations, acquisitions, internal consulting, profit debug, multiple plans and processes, and new product designs for several plants.
Prior to joining Tracor, he owned his own business, Anco, involved in design, consulting in manufacturing of his system, networks, semiconductors, medical problems, strategic planning, problem solving for manufacturing and development engineering, and turnaround situations.

Prior to formatting his own company, he was with Control Data Corporation holding the positions of vice-president of manufacturing and engineering of discs, tapes, controllers, displays, printed circuit boards, power supplies, at all multiple locations in the United States and abroad. He was also responsible for acquisitions and divestures, joint ventures, strategic alliances, and operations involved with manufacturing plants on two sides of the border.
In addition to being heavily involved with the startup and expansion of the computer industries and many others, perhaps his most notable inventions which have directly impacted on the lives of thousands of person around the world are the machine that keeps the human heart pumping when it is out of the body and the machine that cleans the blood for leukemia patients After perfecting these machines, he gave the patents and rights in the associations in the respective fields.

Quite a number of months following the appearance of this article in The Harbor Journal, I was talking with the publisher Chuck Altonen and was told that he had received a request for a number of copies of the article from a person in North Carolina who was Jere's son who had learned about the article and wanted to circulate it among the family members. I asked for the person's name and address and phone number.

I had not been in touch Jere since 1937 when he graduated from Harbor High School so I was anxious for any lead regarding his whereabouts I called the number and said to the person on the other end of the line that I wanted to find out how I could get in touch with Jere Brophy. The voice on the other end of the line said, "I'm Jere Brophy!"

I was surprised to hear him and told him sol He said he was visiting his son and just picked up the phone when it rang 'what luck!

We talked for quite a while trying to get caught up on our lives and I was, to say the least, impressed with Jere's interesting career. But why should I be so impressed? I knew back when I was a kid that he would do great things in his lifetime, and he has.

During the summer of 1986, I became interested in the harbor and concerned regarding what was or rather was not happening there. In September of 1986. I proposed to a number of my friends that we meet and talk about the Harbor's situation. We did.

The next month, October 1986, The Harbor Coalition was formed with the primary objective being "helping the Harbor Help itself." One of the many projects is the sponsoring of the Memorial Day Observance at the Harbor War Memorial on the Harbor High School Campus starting in 1986.

As part of the observance, we selected a Harbor High School graduate who has made exceptional contributions to society since graduation, designating the person the Honored Harbor High School Graduate.

We do this to try to help the community realize the great loss of not just lives, but of people, loved ones, friends. boys with a human potential for good immeasurable at the time they were taken from us. In 1988, Judge Joseph E. Mahoney, of the Court of Common Pleas, who graduated from the class of 1941, was honored.

In 1989, Jere E. Brophy was selected as the Honored Harbor High School Graduate. He attended the Memorial Day Observance, gave a fine speech, and was reunited with many of his classmates from the Class of 1937. The following day, he met with students of Harbor High School's chemistry, physics, and algebra two classes to speak with them and help them learn about the many opportunities awaiting them.

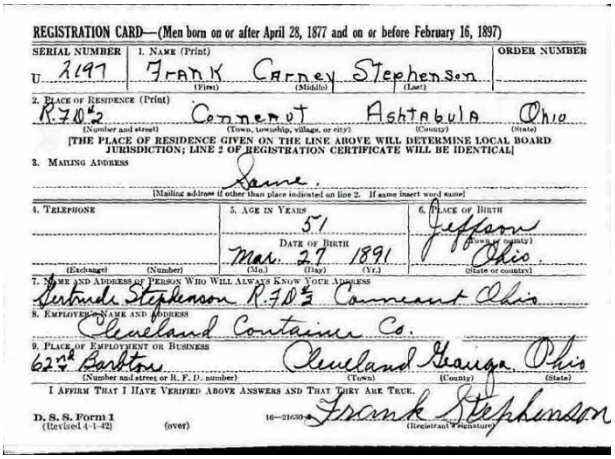
This whole experience has been most rewarding for the Harbor community. Jere Brophy, and me. I will be forever grateful for having been with Jere again after so many years for, in his mild manner, patient attitude, way back in the 1930s, he made an impression that lasted throughout my life, and I am certain, helped me set my sights and hold firm to the various course I have taken with my life.

Again, Jere, thanks for being you and being there when Paul, Johnny, Ray, Lee, and I grew up around you.

Merchant Marine Memories

Frank Carney Stephenson of Conneaut and the Pillory

Merchant Mariner Frank Carney Stephenson of Conneaut, Ohio, served as a Fireman/Watertender on the Pillory. Born on March 27, 1891, in Denmark Township, located within Ashtabula County, Ohio, he was the son of Thomas Samuel Stephenson and Phebe Carman Johnson Stephenson. He grew up alongside his siblings, including sisters Edith and Bertha



REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U 2197 | 1. NAME (Print) Frank (First) Carney (Middle) Stephenson (Last) | ORDER NUMBER

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) R.F.D. 2 (Number and street) Conneaut (Town, township, village, or city) Ashtabula (County) Ohio (State)

[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS Same.
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]

4. TELEPHONE (Exchange) (Number)

5. AGE IN YEARS 57 DATE OF BIRTH Mar. 27 1891 (Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)

6. PLACE OF BIRTH Jefferson (Town or county) Ohio (State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Gertrude Stephenson R.F.D. 2 Conneaut Ohio

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Cleveland Container Co.

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 62nd Barton (Number and street, or R. F. D. number) Cleveland (Town) Georgia (County) Ohio (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 4-1-42) (over) 16—21630-4 Frank Stephenson (Registrant's signature)

and later married Elizabeth Gertrude Sear. The Stephenson's lived in Conneaut, and they had a family that included a son, Cecil Leon Stephenson, born in 1920.

Conneaut had developed into an important hub of merchant shipping and railroad transportation and as the United States worked to increase its wartime production, Frank increasingly felt the need to contribute his efforts by enlisting in the United States Merchant Marine. Although in his early fifties, a few decades beyond the age of the typical man enlisting, his skills were vital to the war effort. He held the rank of Merchant Seaman and specialized as a Fireman Watertender, a demanding and dangerous job with a jobsite located deep inside the Pillory's engine room. Frank's job was regulating the water levels in the steam boilers and maintaining the fires powering the Pillory's steam engine.

The SS Pillory was built in 1933 in Denmark as the SS Jonna at the Nakskov shipyard. The significantly small Jonna, measuring 272 feet long, forty feet wide and with a displacement of 1,517 gross tons, operated under the Danish flag for the Lauritzen shipping company. Her triple expansion reciprocating steam engine paired with a single shaft could push the Jonna to a modest top speed of twelve knots. Nazi Germany occupied Denmark in 1940 while the Jonna docked stranded in New York City. The United States government legally seized her, handing her over to the U.S. War Shipping Administration. The American authorities renamed Jonna the Pillory, reflagged her to operate under a Panamanian registry, and armed her with a small force of U.S. Navy Armed Guard gunners to meet Axis threats. The Pillory began making critical and dangerous supply runs in the Atlantic and Caribbean shipping lanes.

The Sinking of the SS Pillory

On June 5, 1944, just one day before the Allied landings in Normandy, the SS Pillory traveled empty of cargo (in ballast) from San Juan to Guayanilla, Puerto Rico where she had orders to load a sugar shipment. She carried a diverse Merchant Marine crew of forty-seven men – thirty-seven civilian merchant mariners and ten U.S. Navy Armed Guards. The Pillory had left San Juan early in the afternoon and had safely reached a position about five miles north of Cape Borinquen off the northwest tip of Puerto Rico when German submarine U-539, which had sailed from Saint-Nazaire on May first on its third and final war patrol, targeted her.

After sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to Puerto Rico, the U-539 targeted and sank the Pillory. She sank in less than five minutes, making it difficult for her crew and the Navy Armed Guards to escape. Out of the forty-seven people aboard, twenty-two merchant seamen including the Pillory's master, Captain Laurid N. Sorensen, twenty merchant crew members, and 4 Navy guards were either killed by the initial impact or went down with the Pillory.

The sixteen crew members and six Navy Armed Guards who survived managed to jump into the water and cling to floating debris and life rafts.

On June 6, 1944, as the Allied Landings on Normandy took place, the U.S. Navy submarine chaser USS PC-469 rescued them and brought them safely ashore to San Juan, Puerto Rico. The SS Pillory is cited in Naval History as the last Allied merchant ship that an Aix submarine sank in the Caribbean region during World War II.

An American Gold Star Veteran, Frank Carney Stephenson's name is listed on national rolls of honor, including the Honor States Archive. Historical maritime databases like Uboat.net

commemorating the civilian mariners who braved the perils of war also list his name. His grave at South Denmark Cemetery, located in Denmark Center in Ashtabula County, does not contain his body because he was lost at sea. His grave is a cenotaph, a tombstone or marker placed to honor a person whose remains lie elsewhere.

Tardy Recognition

The U.S. government first recognized the Merchant Marine as a formal national defense asset through the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, but World War II merchant mariners were only granted official veteran status in 1988.

Key Recognition Milestones

• 1775–1783 (The Revolution): Merchant mariners and privateers served during the American Revolution before an official U.S. Navy existed, though not under a unified modern "Merchant Marine" organization.

• 1920 (Jones Act): The Merchant Marine Act of 1920 regulated commercial shipping and noted the fleet's value to commerce and defense but did not create a unified service branch.

• 1936 (Formal Establishment): The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 officially established the U.S. Maritime Commission and declared the Merchant Marine to be a naval auxiliary and the "Fourth Arm of National Defense".

• 1988 (Veteran Status): A federal court ruling and subsequent legislation signed by President Ronald Reagan finally granted World War II merchant mariners official veteran status and access to GI Bill benefits after decades of denial.

The Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea?

The SS *Pillory* went down in the Atlantic Ocean, just north of the boundary where it meets the Caribbean Sea about twenty to thirty miles off the northwestern coast of Puerto Rico in the Mona Passage.

Several military tribute registries generalize the theater of operations as the Caribbean, but geographically, anything north of the Puerto Rico mainland coastline technically sits in the open waters of the North Atlantic Ocean.

The Pillory Casualty Statistics

Geographic Archives: In this classification, the Pillory is recorded as an Atlantic Ocean casualty. In the official U.S. Navy Casualty Lists, men like Bruce Barton Daniels. Frank Carney Stephenson, and Richard Hayes Tieche are explicitly categorized under the geographic location "Atlantic Ocean.”

The Battle of the Atlantic

The Battle of the Atlantic was the longest and most bitterly fought battle of World War II. It started on September 3, 1939, when a German submarine torpedoed the British liner Athenia less than 12 hours after the outbreak of hostilities between England and Germany, and it ended on May 5, 1945, when Grand Admiral Carl Doenitz sent a signal ordering all U-boats to cease combat operations and return to Germany.

The Battle of the Caribbean

The Battle of the Caribbean lasted nine and a half months—from February 16, 1942, to November 30, 1942. In that comparatively brief time, German submarines torpedoed 263 ships in the Caribbean and its approaches, with a gross tonnage of 1,362,278.

It is a little known, or at least neglected, fact that the sinkings in the Caribbean during this period were greater than the losses incurred on the North Atlantic Convoy Routes, the Eastern Sea Frontier, and the Canadian Coastal Zone, all three combined.

https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1954/september/battle-caribbean U.S. Naval Institute

Conneaut Remembers

To the men and women of the United States who served in the Armed Forces. Photographed by Craig Duda April 12, 2025.

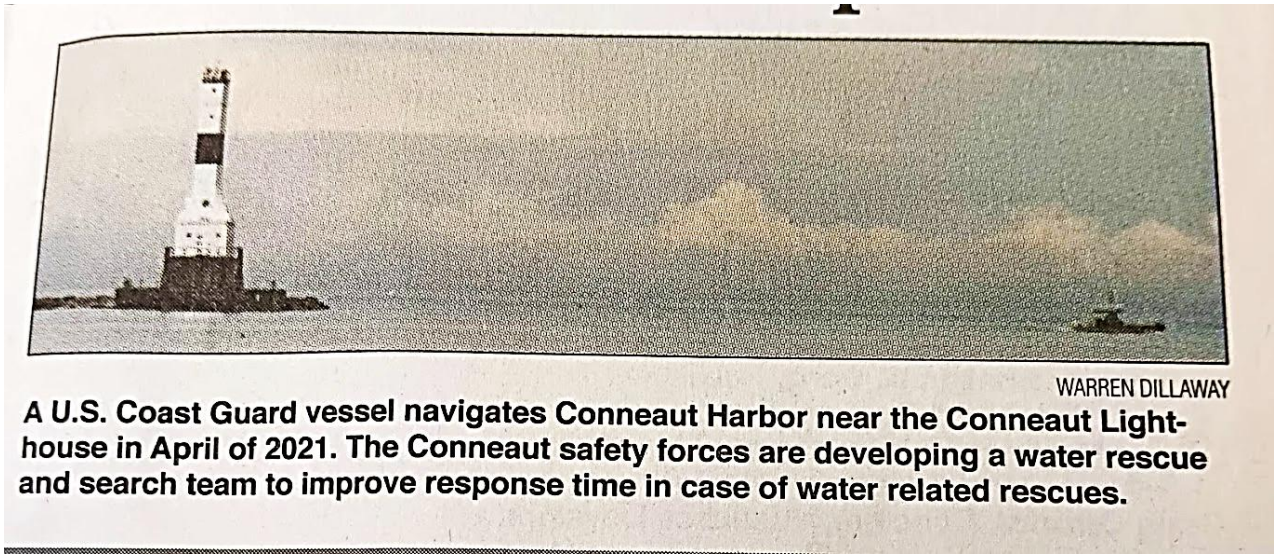
Photographed by Craig Doda, April 12, 2025

WWI • WWII • Korea • Vietnam • Desert Storm • POW/MIA You are not forgotten.

United States Army • United States Navy • AmVets • American Legion • United States Air Force • United States Marine Corps • Air National Guard • Army National Guard • Veterans of Foreign Wars • Vietnam Veterans of America • Disabled American Veterans • Merchant Marine • United States Coast Guard

The Veterans Memorial located at the intersection of Buffalo Street and Main Street in Conneaut, Ohio honors veterans of World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Desert Shield.

Water Rescue and Search Team to Hasten Emergency Response Time



WARREN DILLAWAY

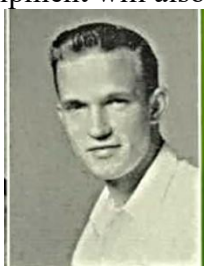
A U.S. Coast Guard vessel navigates Conneaut Harbor near the Conneaut Lighthouse in April of 2021. The Conneaut safety forces are developing a water rescue and search team to improve response time in case of water related rescues.

Wednesday, June 21, 2023
(Based on a story by Warren Dillaway)

The first three phases of a project to create a local water rescue and recovery team are complete thanks to fundraising by area businesses and civic organizations. Kori Marcy Campbell said that about two years ago discussions pinpointed the need for a local search and rescue team after a Pittsburgh firefighter died while trying to save his son in the gap on the western edge of the break wall in Conneaut.

The Conneaut Fire Department and the Pittsburg Area Fire Department compared technology and notes and concluded that different technology would be needed in rescue operations instead of recovery. The Conneaut Rotary Club Spearheaded Fund Raising and grants were awarded, which enabled the purchase of two sonar units for $8,000. The next phase involved equipment and training for eight divers to be part of the Conneaut Water Rescue and Recovery Team. One of the sonar devices has been placed in the Conneaut Police Department boat and a second will be available for use in one of the two fire department vessels available to the city.

Conneaut Assistant Fire Chief Steve Sanford said the new response team will better serve the community as rescues are more likely with the new technology. He said the equipment will also be available for mutual aid throughout Ashtabula County.



Conneaut Fire Chief Steve Lee said creating the team from scratch has been a challenge. He said more diver training is planned for July. “We are pretty much surface only {right now,” he said.

Delmas Bennett was a diver with many rescues to his credit. He was intensely involved in and experienced rescue diving.

Lighthouse Listings

From John Johnson’s Scrap Book

This vintage photograph shows the Ile Aux Galets Lighthouse, also widely known as the Skillagalee Island Light.

It is situated on a low-lying gravel island in the northeast corner of Lake Michigan, between Beaver Island and the Michigan mainland.

"Ile aux Galets" is French for "Isle of Pebbles". Because early English-speaking settlers and sailors had difficulty pronouncing the French name, it eventually morphed colloquially into "Skillagalee".