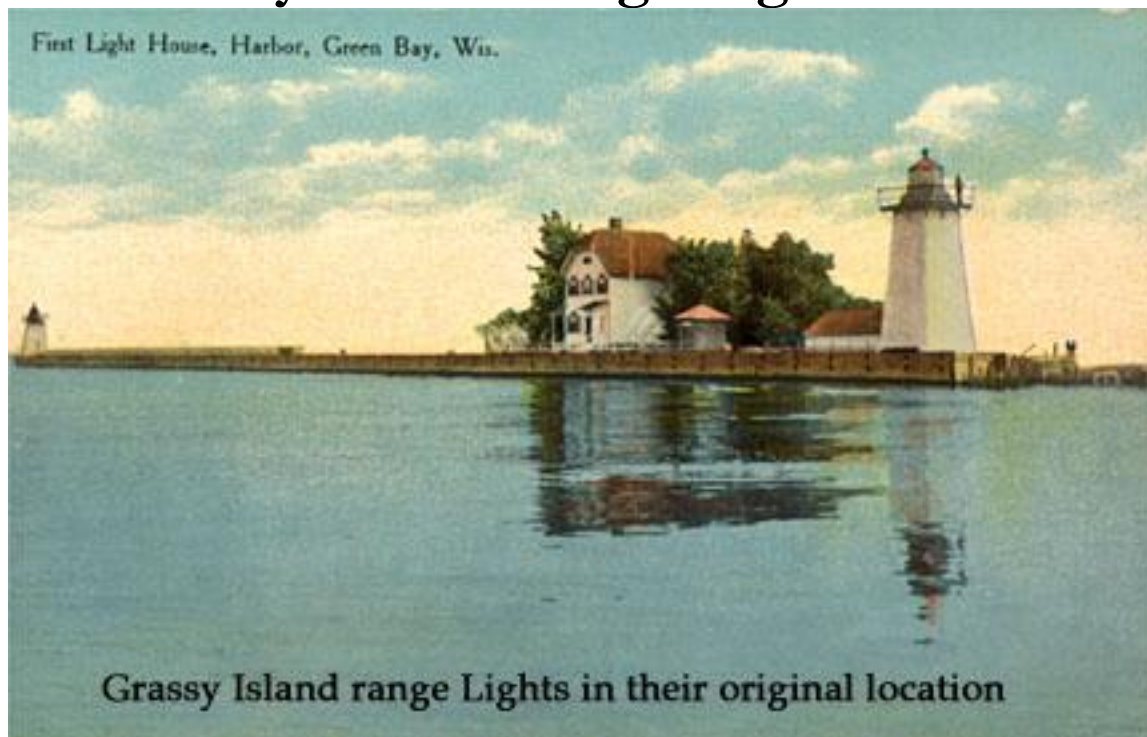


Grassy Island Range Lights Timeline



Work on the Grassy Island Range Lights began in the spring of 1872. Standing on a timber pier on the east side of the cut, a pair of timber framed shingled beacon lights were erected 676 feet apart. The 25-foot tall lower light at the northern end of the pier was topped with an octagonal cast iron lantern, and equipped with a fixed white Sixth Order Fresnel lens. Its' light was visible for a distance of 11 miles in clear weather. The upper light stood ten feet taller, and outfitted with a lens of similar order and characteristic, was visible for a distance of 13 miles. A two story keepers dwelling was erected approximately 100 feet to the north of the Upper Light, and with the construction of a boathouse, privy and woodshed, construction of the station was completed in October. Joseph B. Wing, the stations first keeper is first listed at the station on October 12. He did not officially exhibit the lights until the night of November 15, 1872.

By 1880 the roofs of the dwelling and woodshed had deteriorated to a point that they needed complete

replacement, and the dwelling was also completely repainted inside and out. 1889 saw the erection of a breakwater to stem erosion on the east side of the island, and a 10 by 16 foot landing dock was erected beside the boathouse.

Keeper Wing passed away on October 24, 1895 after 23 years of faithfully keeping the Grassy Island Range Lights. To replace Wing, Ole Hansen accepted a transfer from Ahnapee. The year after Hansen arrived, a work crew arrived at the island and demolished and rebuilt both the kitchen addition and the boathouse, which were showing signs of damage as a result of frequent standing water around the station.

The steamer ALICE M GILL arrived on the island in 1901 with a work party and materials for repairs. After both Upper and Lower lights were re-shingled and painted, 40 yards of stone were placed to the east of the station to serve as a protection against rising water levels. 1901 also saw the addition of a First Assistant Keeper of the station, with Guy E. Leach appointed to the position on September 5, 1901. With lake levels continuing to rise, in 1902 the boathouse was raised and placed atop 17 posts driven into the ground, and a 44-foot long trestle walk was laid from the boathouse to the landing crib. The 65-foot long walkway from the revetment at the south side of the dwelling leading to the boathouse was also raised on posts.

After seven years at Grassy Island, Ole Hansen arranged a “station swap” with Louis Hutzler, the keeper at Tail Point, and on December 31 the two keepers traded positions.

On may 15, 1907, a pile driver was towed out to the island to drive 250 feet of pile and corrugated sheet metal revetments to the east of the dwelling to further stave rising lake levels,

and with its' foundation still frequently in standing water, the dwelling was also resided and painted.

Acetylene lights with automatic sun valves were installed in both ranges in 1934. With this change, the characteristic of both lights were also changed, with the Upper light changed to fixed green with a visibility range of 10 miles, and the Lower light to a single green flash every 5 seconds. With the sun valve automatically turning the lights on at dusk and off at sunrise, the attention of a keeper was no longer necessary, and at 66 years of age, Louis Hutsler retired from service, thus serving as the last keeper of the Grassy Island Range.

Dredging in the harbor continued on an almost annual basis throughout the years, and the original channel through the island was successively widened on numerous occasions, with each widening operation being performed on the west of the channel opposite the range lights. With the universal adoption of radar and LORAN, the range lights had long since outlived their purpose as navigational aids, and in 1966 the decision was made to destroy the lights in place, and to widen the channel through what was left of the east side of Grassy Island.

Hearing of the Coast Guard's plans for the historic beacons, Green Bay Yacht Club members managed to arrange for the lights to be relocated to the Yacht Club property on the east side of the Fox River.

1967 – The Lighthouses were moved from Grassy Island to the GBYC grounds. One was placed at the harbor entrance and the other was placed on the Yacht Club grounds adjoining the clubhouse.



Spring 1988 – the GBYC Board recognized the lighthouses were deteriorating and the integrity of the support system was declining. They were in the process of making plans to destroy them. Merlin Baenen requested permission from the GBYC to rebuild the footing of the now leaning lighthouse and also agreed to bear the expenses.

June 1988 – The footings on the lighthouse were replaced. This was a temporary solution.



June 1988 – Merlin Baenen make recommendations to the GBYC to take action toward applying for a “Break wall” permit. The break wall would help to protect the harbor

from severe weather. Soon after, efforts were made to install a break wall.

June 1992 – The US Coast Guard in Green Bay asked the GBYC to move the lighthouse at the mouth of the harbor in order to make room for the new Coast Guard station. GBYC declined the light and gave the Coast Guard permission to destroy it. Merlin Baenen appealed to the GBYC board to allow restoration. GBYC granted permission, but would not fund the effort.

- **Merlin Baenen joined forces with David Nelson. They moved the light one hundred feet east and placed it on GBYC property.**

1995 – GBYC built a new clubhouse and decommissioned the old clubhouse. A new plan was needed to find a permanent home for the lights.

Merlin Baenen and Dave Nelson developed the plan to permanently place the lighthouses on the break wall.

- **The significance of the break wall project: The break wall had been put in place to protect the harbor. However, the break wall had been damaged in the past by severe storms. Action was needed to stabilize and strengthen the break wall in order to serve as the foundation for the lighthouses.**
- **The result: Merlin Baenen and David Nelson committed themselves to the break wall project. Steel pilings would eventually need to be installed to protect all sides of the break wall from weather.**
- **These discussions solidified the partnership between Merlin Baenen and David Nelson.**

1995 – Merlin Baenen and David Nelson formed their team of “lighthouse Keepers.” They engineered the design for the break wall reconstruction and began soliciting bids from contractors to perform the necessary work.

September 1997 – The break wall reconstruction project began. The necessary permits and approvals were obtained.

- **The Brown County Historical Society became an integral partner in the project.**

May 1998 – Lunda Construction was awarded the bid and began working on the break wall. Steel sheet piling was laid to form the secure break wall. Reinforcements were made in all aspects to support the weight of the lighthouses: 10 tons.

Summer 1998 – The North lighthouse was moved to its’ permanent home on the newly reconstructed break wall.

Spring 1999 – The South lighthouse was moved to its’ permanent location on the break wall.



2004 – The Grassy Island Lighthouses were accepted into the Wisconsin State Historic Register.

2005 – The Grassy Island Lighthouses were accepted into the National Historic Register.

Much of the information contained herein comes from the website *Seeing the Lights* which is researched and maintained by Terry Pepper. Many thanks to him for permission to use his materials.

(www.terrypepper.com/lights/index.htm)

**If you are interested in helping to preserve the Grassy Island Range Lights, tax deductible contributions can be made to the Grassy Island Range Lights Inc. a 501(c)3 non profit corporation, and mailed to:
Grassy Island Range Lights, Inc.
c/o Green Bay Yacht Club
P O Box 485
Green Bay, WI 54305-0485**

A receipt will be mailed for your records.